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MEET THE TEAM



EDITOR // GRAHAM E. HANCOCK

A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to the shelf every single month.



BUILD EXPERT AND HISTORIAN // DANIEL KONSTANSKI

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.



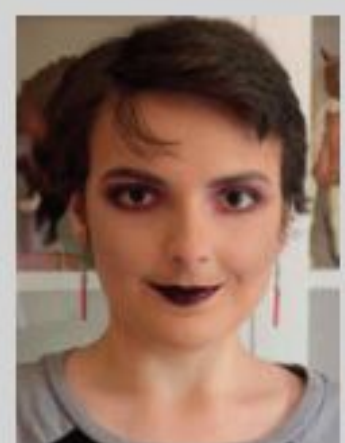
BUILD SPECIALIST // SIMON PICKARD

Our experienced MOC expert who is a regular on the show circuit. If there's a way to build it, then he can show you how.



PHOTOGRAPHER // PHIL WRIGHTON

Models never look better than when this prize winning LEGO photographer has worked his magic to produce beautiful Blocks covers.



REVIEWS WRITER // KAT-REES JAUKE

Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets to see if they are satisfying to build and look impressive on display.



REVIEWS WRITER // DAVE CARTLIDGE

Whether it's from Marvel Super Heroes, Friends, Technic or any other theme, Dave has the LEGO know-how to assess the latest sets.

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WELCOME



Cover Pic: Phil Wrighton

**MANY OF US
REMEMBER
ENJOYING
– AND GETTING
FRUSTRATED –
PLAYING
PAC-MAN**

The nostalgia is strong this month in Blocks magazine. Whether you grew up with the game or were introduced to it by a parent, many of us remember enjoying – and getting frustrated – playing PAC-MAN. Designer Sven Franic takes us inside the development of the new LEGO set that includes an ingenious mechanism to make the ghosts chase PAC-MAN around.

Those rose-tinted glasses stay on as we look back at Blacktron and show you how to build a decoration for your LEGO room that depicts the iconic logo. If Town is your favoured classic range, then you'll enjoy a tongue-in-cheek rundown of the various companies that popped up in the theme during its run.

It was hard to hear the news that legendary LEGO designer Jørn Thomsen passed away earlier this year. We look back at his prolific career, in which he touched beloved themes including Western, Space and Mindstorms.

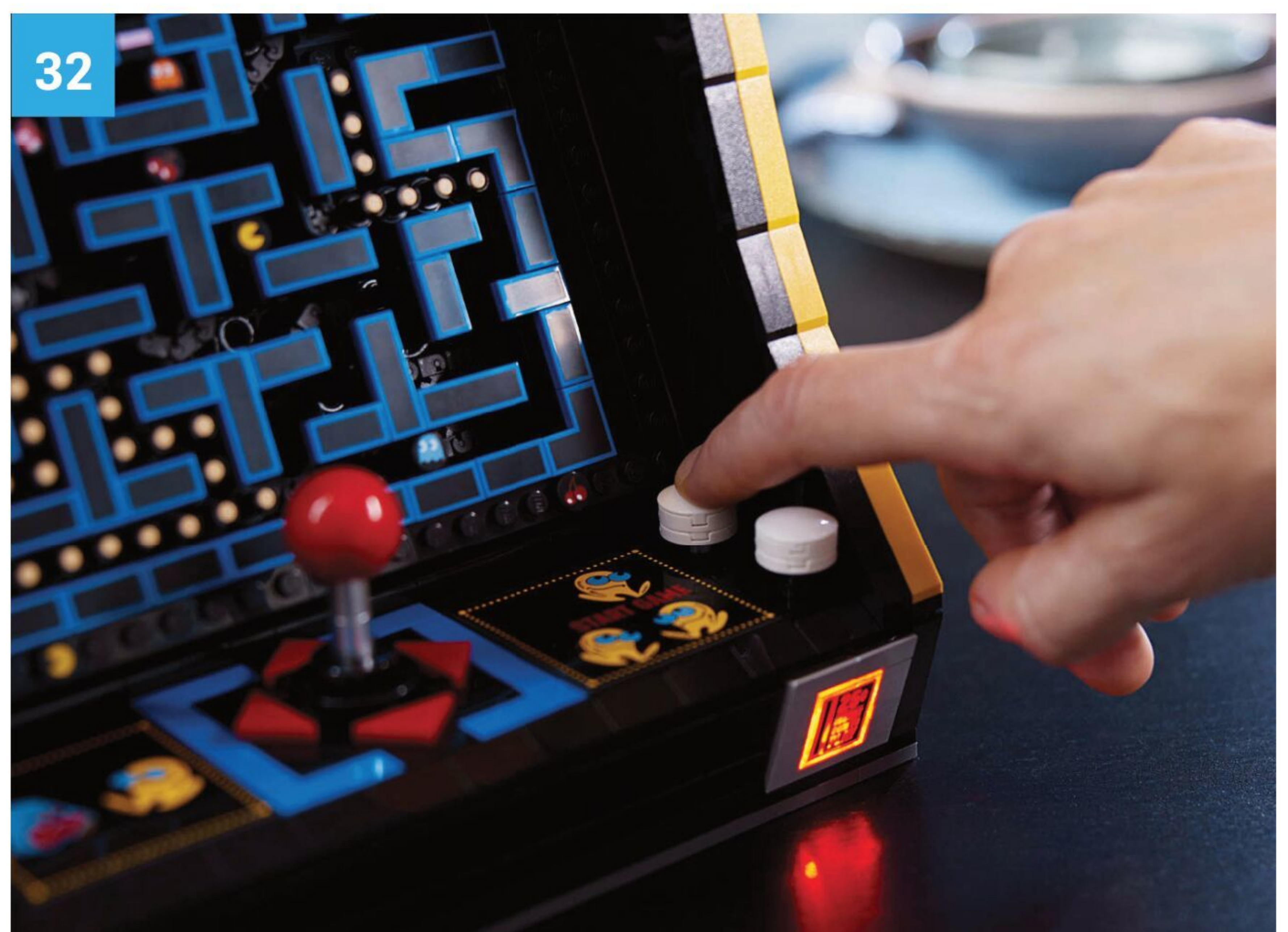
The work of Jørn and the rest of the design team continues to inspire creativity in different ways. In our exclusive interview with Liam Jensen, he explains how his Brick Classicists project is making the ancient world accessible. The spotlight then turns to Vignweek, RebelLUG's contest that brings out the best of vignette builders.

Enjoy this month's issue of Blocks magazine and be sure to send us an email – we'd love to know which LEGO themes give you that warm nostalgic feeling or hear about your favourite set designed by Jørn Thomsen.

Leg godt!

Graham E. Hancock

Editor // graham@blocksmag.com



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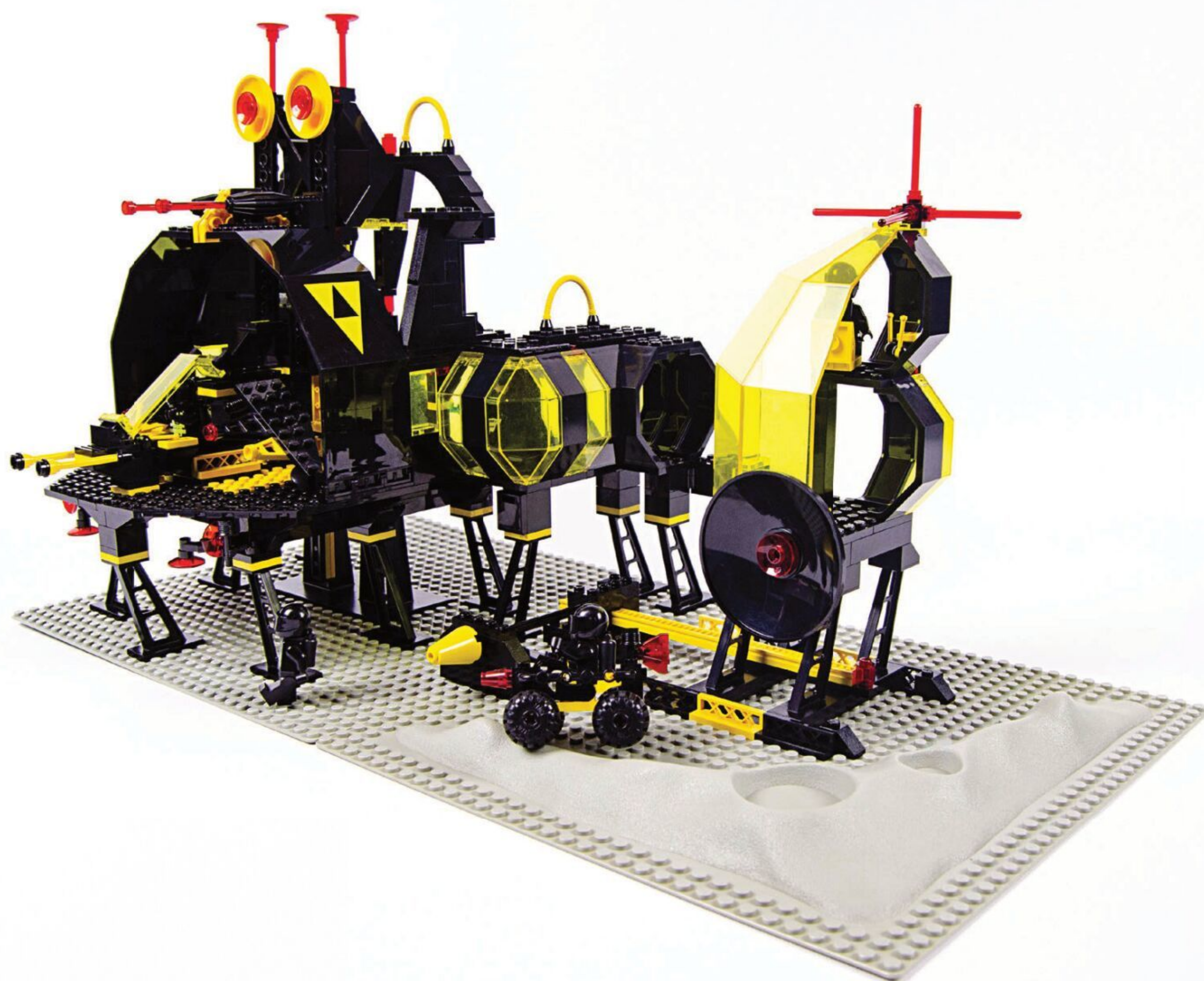
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What did the LEGO Group's early attempts to get adults building look like?



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Build a biplane for Indiana Jones to complement the enemy plane in 77012 Fighter Plane Chase.

LEGOtalk

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Rounding up the brick conversation each month. E-mail graham@blocksmag.com to share your views



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STAR LETTER

HI BLOCKS,

I've been a reader of and subscriber to Blocks magazine for nearly a year now. I love the magazine! Excellent content, great articles, interesting reviews and build techniques. I wanted to share how LEGO helped me through a very trying time.

I've always been a LEGO fan. My nan bought me 497 Galaxy Explorer back in 1983. LEGO Space was my thing. I was hooked at 10 years old. I had a break from LEGO in my early adult years, then it made a big return in 2013...

Long story short, I got cancer in 2013. When the severe side effects of chemotherapy led to what is termed 'chemo head'; a sluggish feeling and slowing of thought process, building LEGO sets that my then fiancée (now wife) bought for me helped me to focus.

LEGO helped me have a sense of control, at a time when I had none. It helped me achieve something – a Technic car, a plane or crane. I fell in love with LEGO again.

Now I am 10 years out of treatment and a fully-fledged AFOL. We have a five-year-old son who is NINJAGO mad, so am I, and we play with our sets virtually every day.

Your magazine has helped me see more of the LEGO community and show me how other people love this amazing LEGO System. Please keep doing what you do.

Here are a few pics of our sets. I did a MOC of City of Stix...

Andy McNeil

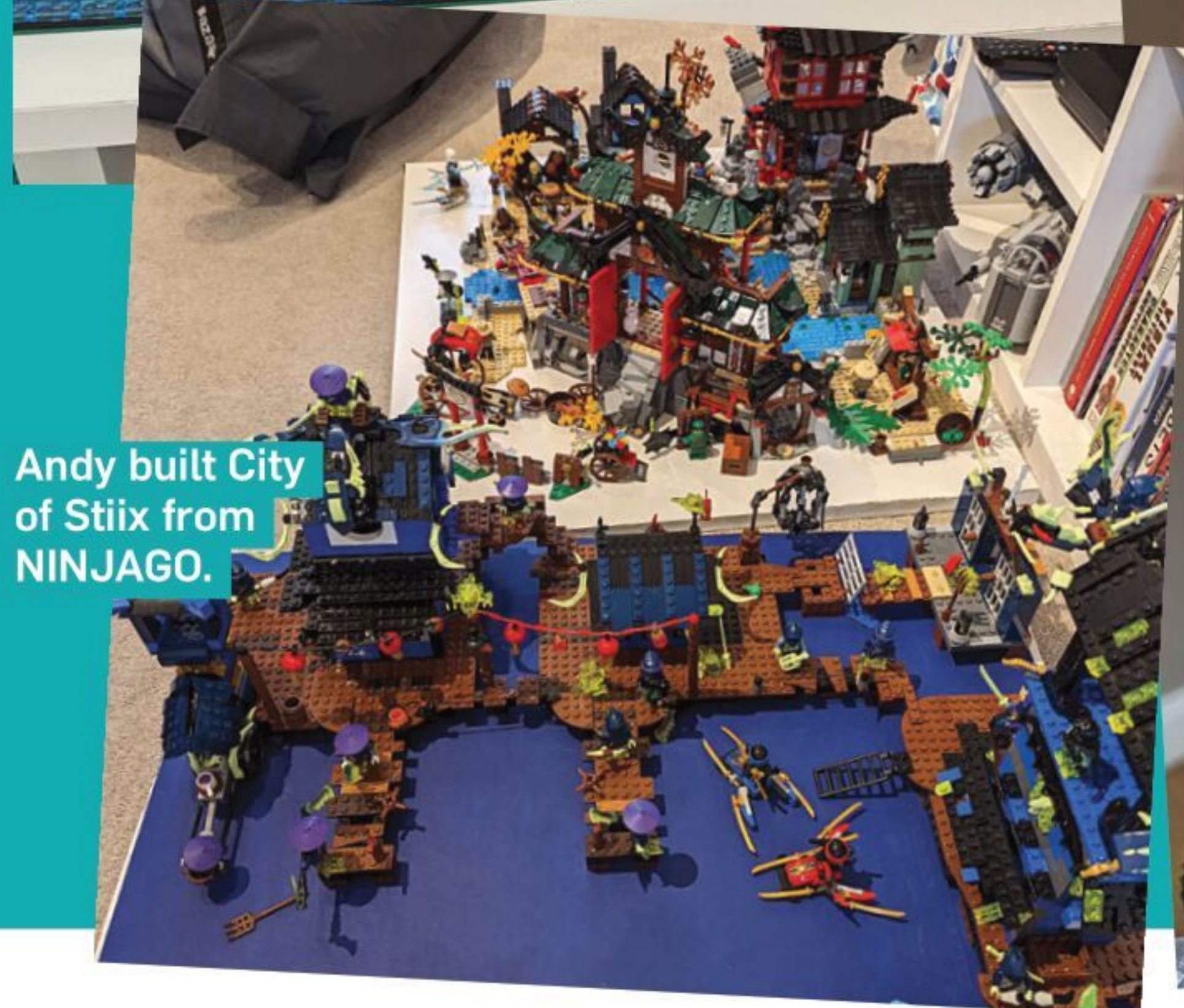
Thanks for sharing that story Andy, it's nice to hear that the LEGO hobby helped you during the most difficult of times. That you can now share it with your son makes it all the more special – Graham

NINJAGO City modulars.



Andy's now-wife bought him LEGO sets again.

Andy built City of Stix from NINJAGO.



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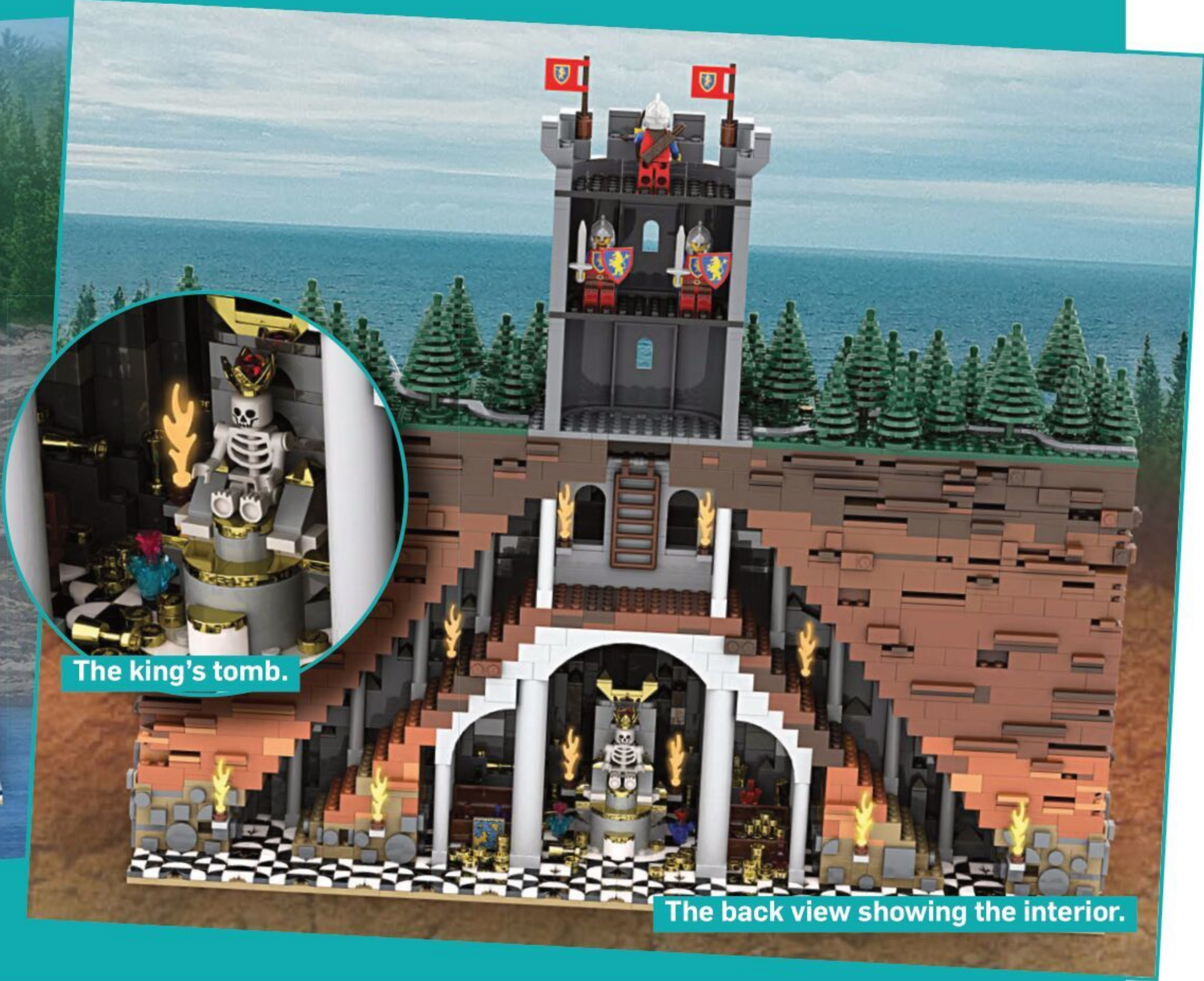


TREASURE TROVE

Stefano Sioli is an archaeologist and followed his passion to create a model inspired by his work. There's a ground level featuring a tower, then there's a tomb underground where you can see the deceased king and his treasure. A group of adventurers seeking the treasure have arrived by sea. To support Stefano's build, search for Steo2864 on Ideas.



The front view of the cliff.



The king's tomb.

The back view showing the interior.

MINI MOLINEUX

Chris Weaver built this enormous LEGO model of Wolverhampton Wanderers' Molineux stadium. It took around 18 months to build and uses approximately 11,000 pieces.

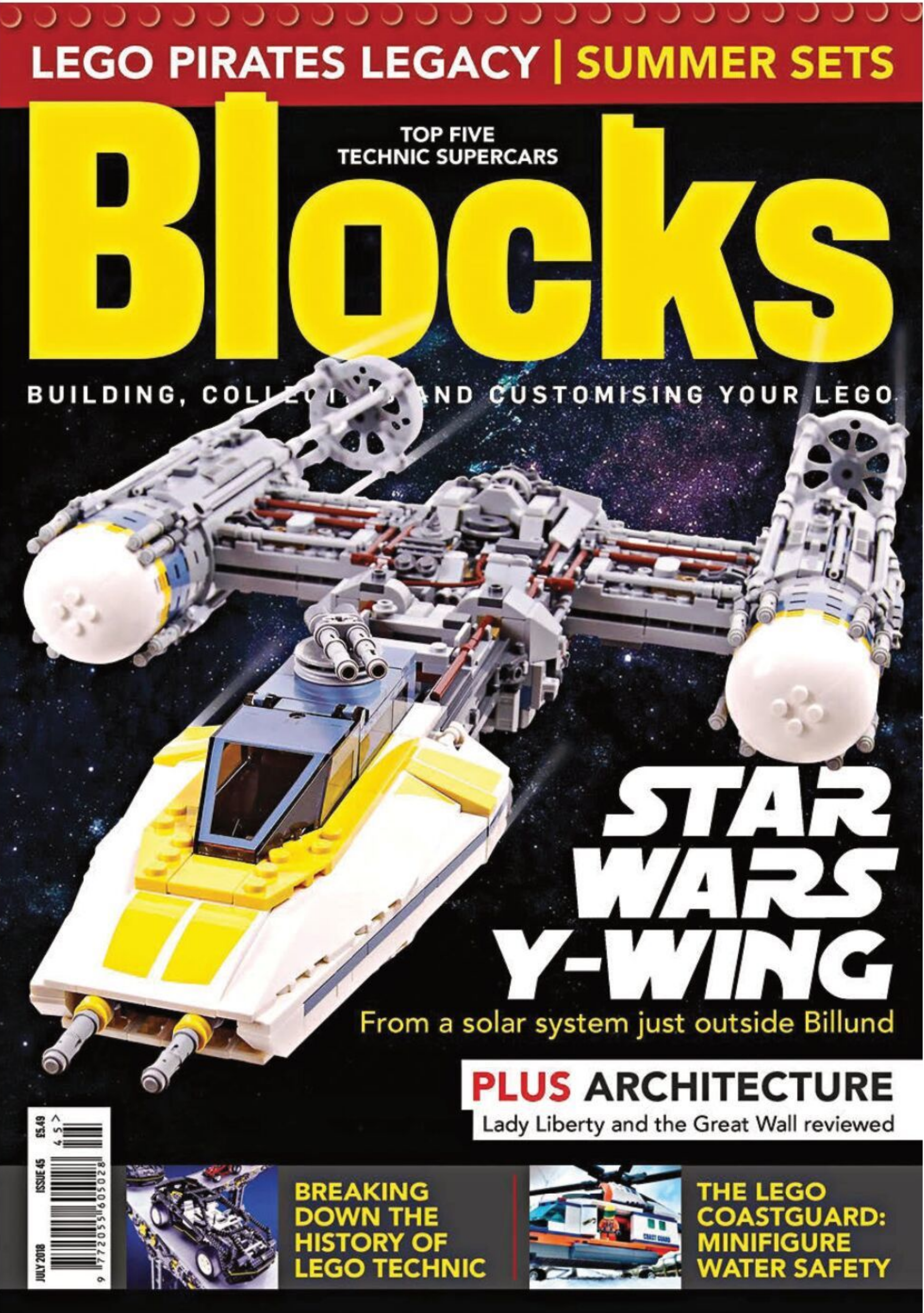


It's packed with details based on the stadium.



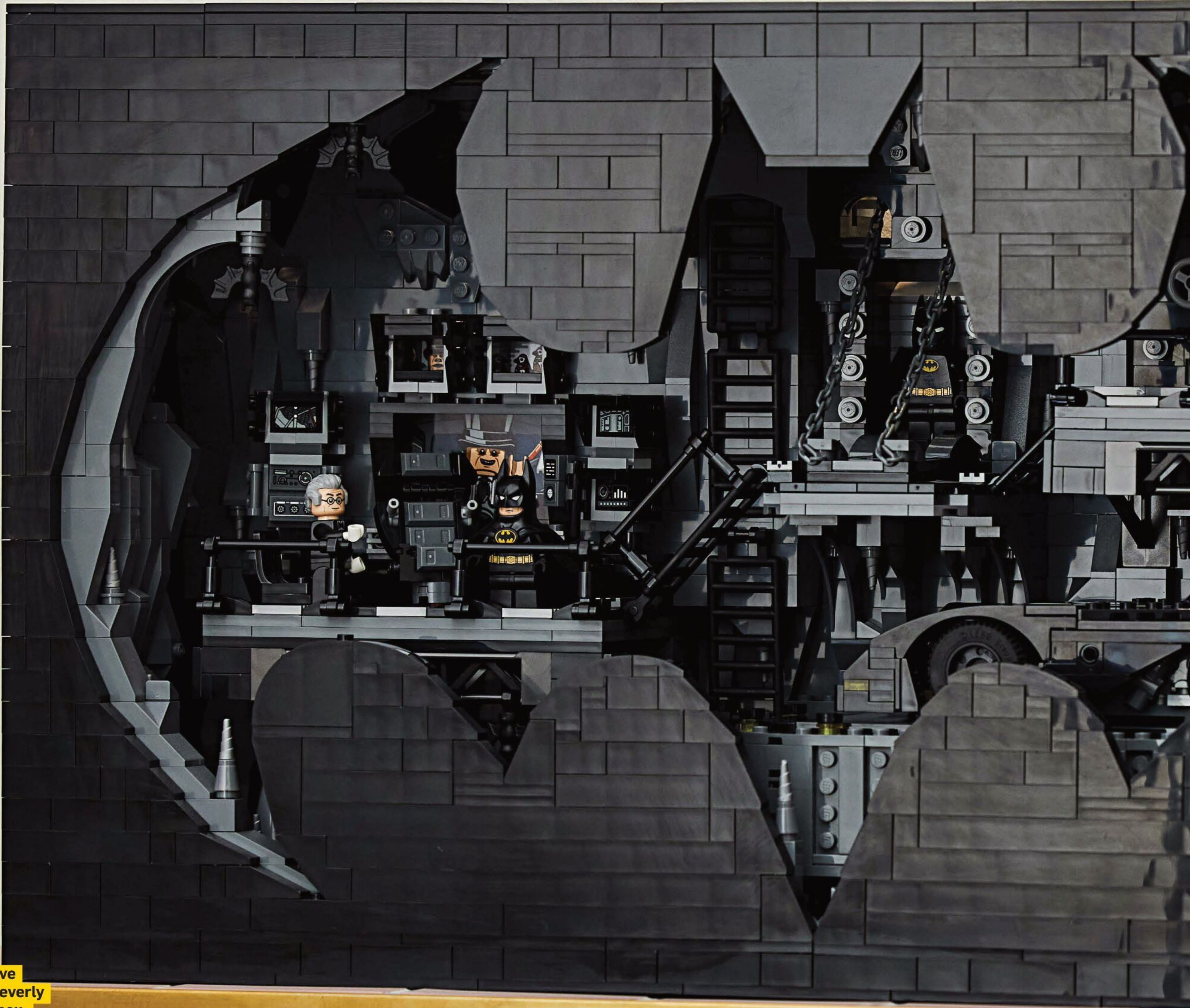
FIVE YEARS AGO THIS MONTH...

The newest LEGO Star Wars UCS Y-wing took the cover, with the history of the Technic theme and a look at the legacy of Pirates inside.



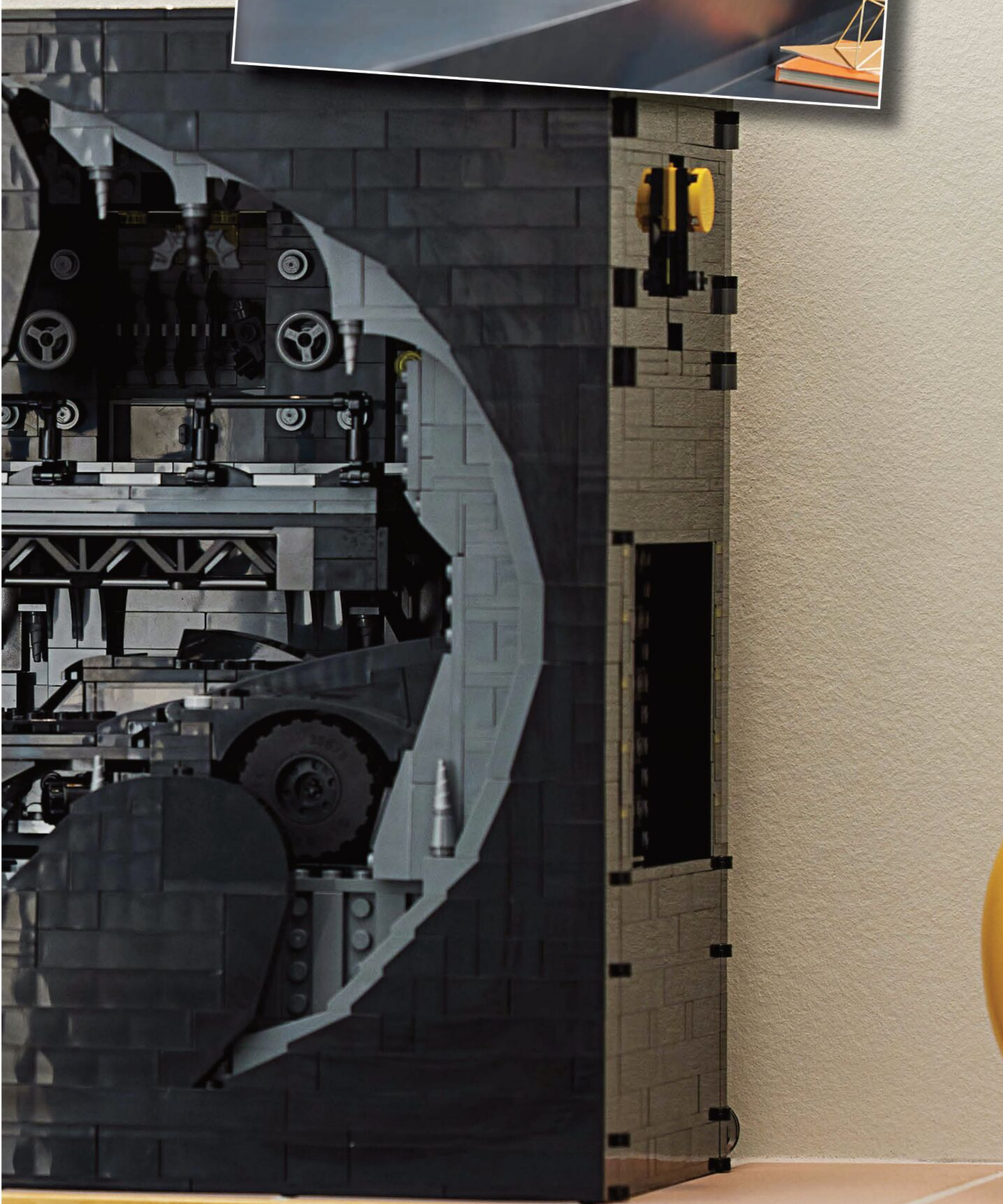
BATCAVE RETURNS

Just like Batman and Catwoman, this new Batcave set is split – right down the centre



The Batcave sits in a cleverly designed box.

The Batcave opens up.



HIDDEN WITHIN THE bowels of Wayne Manor, filled with the sounds of flapping bat wings and boasting an arsenal of cool gadgets, the Batcave is where the world's greatest detective analyses clues to solve Gotham's latest mysteries. It's a location that's unique for each iteration of Batman, usually reflecting the specific characterisation. Where there is Batman there has to be a Batcave.

While there have been multiple Batcave sets since the LEGO Group and DC Comics first collaborated in 2006, 76252 Batcave Shadow Box plays on nostalgia for the 1990s and *Batman Returns*, the Tim Burton classic. The film saw the Penguin running rampant on the streets of Gotham and Catwoman plotting her revenge against Max Shreck, with Batman stuck in the middle of their machinations.

Although the indisputably Tim Burton film met with mixed reactions at the time, Michael Keaton's portrayal of the character is still a fan favourite. His recent return to the role in *The Flash* demonstrated that audience affection for him remains. 76252 Batcave Shadow Box has been released to coincide with that epic comeback.

SHADOWS ARE A PERFECT FIT FOR THE DARK KNIGHT

Shadows are a perfect fit for the Dark Knight. A shadow box is typically a type of display case that allows for different layers of perspective, which is what this set uses to combine play with its bat iconography. Opening the front reveals the sprawling details of the cave, including the sleek lines of a miniature Batmobile.

The model is packed with weapons, extra bat-suits and gadgets for Batman. On the security screen there's a recording of Catwoman, a reference to the exclusive minifigure printed with hand-stitched costume detailing, along with other images so you can change up the monitor display.

And as if that wasn't enough Bat-stalgia, 76224 Batmobile: Batman vs. The Joker Chase and 76265 Batwing: Batman vs. The Joker are coming in August. The former is the cheapest way to grab the swooping, curvy lines of the Batmobile and get a Keaton inspired Batman minifigure.

These sets prove is that the love for this iteration of Batman is still strong within the LEGO portfolio, just when a whole new generation of fans have met the character in *The Flash*. Batman is back and it's time to get nuts with some bricks. ■

76252 Batcave Shadow Box is available now.

NEW IDEAS SETS TO COLLECT

LEGO Ideas has launched the Hocus Pocus set and announced two new, but very different, animal-focused builds

21341 DISNEY HOCUS Pocus: The Sanderson Sisters' Cottage is the latest set to be released in the fan-driven LEGO Ideas theme. It's a 2,316 piece set inspired by the 1993 Disney live action movie Hocus Pocus. Amber Veyt came up with the original MOC and submitted it to LEGO Ideas, where it has achieved 10,000 votes twice, but was rejected by the LEGO Group the first time.

The film's core characters are included in the released version of the set, which professional

LEGO designers adapted from Amber's concept. 'I've always been a huge fan of Hocus

I LITERALLY WATCH IT EVERY YEAR AND NEVER GET SICK OF IT

Pocus. I literally watch it every year and never get sick of it,' the fan designer said.

Two more fan designs will launch as official LEGO models once the designers have worked their magic. Jonny Campbell's Jaws is inspired by Steven Spielberg's 1975 movie. The build features Quint's boat and of course, the movie's star – the shark that terrorises Amity Town.

Damian Andres has a much less violent product idea now going through the design process, having created a large sculpture of a cat – complete with saucer of milk. ■

It can be displayed as the house or the museum.



A blocky friend for your home.



Your minifigures should stay out of the water.



NINJAGO REIMAGINED

Dragons Rising opens up a new era of NINJAGO, although the classic characters are not too far away

LEGO FRIENDS ISN'T the only theme getting a fresh look this year, with NINJAGO having launched sets that were intended to start a new chapter for the long-running theme. They tie into the new Dragons Rising season of the animated show, which is streaming and airing pretty much everywhere.

New ninja characters Sora and Arin are taking centre stage along with Riyu, a baby dragon. The trio must reach their true potential and find the classic ninja, who have gone missing as the realms have become merged. As ever, the show is building on its complicated lore.

'As well as welcoming back our well-known ninja, we are equally excited to introduce new

fantastic ninja and dragon characters,' said Head of Product Nigel Kong.

71799 NINJAGO City Markets is the new centrepiece set, built using more than 6,000

WE ARE EXCITED TO INTRODUCE NEW FANTASTIC NINJA AND DRAGON CHARACTERS

pieces and providing 21 minifigures to populate the metropolis. It connects to the previously released NINJAGO modulars. ■





■ BOOK OF THE MONTH // THE LEGO CHRISTMAS GAMES BOOK

Is it ever too early to start planning for Christmas? DK has a new book that will be released before the holiday season this year, packed with LEGO brick games to play. It could be a great way to keep the family occupied that isn't charades and if you're reading this magazine, you'll probably be at an advantage when it comes to competing in LEGO games.

■ SET OF THE MONTH // 40649 UP-SCALED LEGO MINIFIGURE

Following LEGO House's exclusive 40504 A Minifigure Tribute, this much more generic large buildable minifigure has launched. While the classic smile and iconic baseball hat are both great, this set offers a great starting point for customisation. With a little imagination and a box of bricks, a lot can be done with this set.



FAN MODELS SELECTED

Five finalists have been announced for the next BrickLink Designer Program series

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, BrickLink announced that 15 sets will be released each year as the LEGO Group's subsidiary starts offering more fan-designed models than ever before. Fans submitted digitally designed MOCs for Series 1, then users selected the ones they wanted to see produced.

The BrickLink team went through the submissions and selected five finalists that will be available to pre-order next February, then sent out later in the year. The Old Train Engine Shed, Mountain Fortress, Parisian Street, General Store – Wild West and the Snack Shack are all minifigure scale, but offer a variety of subject matter.

Voting for Series 2 recently closed and the five successful designs will be announced in August. If you want to submit a build, read the guidelines at BrickLink and get ready for Series 3 to open up soon. ■

■ FANS SUBMITTED DIGITALLY DESIGNED MOCs FOR SERIES 1 ■



A maximum of 20,000 Mountain Fortress sets will be produced.

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ SPIDER-VERSE

Animated sequel Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse features hundreds of Spider-People from different realities, including a Miguel O'Hara with a murky moral code. He contacts the greatest of them all – LEGO Spider-Man himself, who appears in a brick-built world for a few frames.

■ BRICKTALES BUILDS

Pick a Brick continues to offer parts packs for building models, this time inspired by mobile game Bricktales. These packs take some of the builds seen in the game and replicate them physically. Like the previous fan-inspired releases, they don't come cheap.

■ LE MANS LEGO RACE

Technic builders and PEUGEOT SPORT designers teamed up at the Le Man 24-hour race to build 42156 Peugeot 9x8 24H Le Mans Hybrid Hypercar... in full car size. The builders worked through the night to get all 626,392 elements together. Pieces had been combined in advance to make 'hyper elements' that were then snapped together.

■ BRICK SAMIRA

As part of the LEGO marketing campaign for Pride, actor Samira Wiley (Orange is the New Black and The Handmaid's Tale) co-created a 41,000-brick portrait showing her in front of a patterned background. It's on display now in LEGO House. The LEGO Group will be at Pride events in Munich, Berlin, London and Copenhagen this summer.

JUST THE FACTS 40634 Icons of Play



Last year's Women's Euros tournament was the most watched ever and culminated with the England team's win.

The set contains 15 minifigures in total.

Real-life footballers Megan Rapinoe, Yūki Nagasato, Sam Kerr and Asisat Oshoala are included in the set.

Research commissioned by the LEGO Group showed 82% of girls think it's okay for girls to play football...

...and so do 71% of boys.

There are 899 pieces in the set.

LEGO STORE IN BATTERSEA

The UK's latest LEGO Store has opened in London's Battersea Power Station shopping centre

AFTER YEARS OF work, a revitalised London's Battersea Power Station is home to an upmarket shopping centre – and a new LEGO Store is now part of it.

The coal power station was decommissioned in 1983 and the building sat empty ever since. For the past 10 years, plans have been underway to restore the huge building on the River Thames to offer an appealing new space while acknowledging its heritage. BIG, the architects behind LEGO House, worked on the

IT'S VERY SPECIAL TO OPEN THIS ONE IN THE ICONIC BATTERSEA POWER STATION

design for the public square.

Offices, penthouses and leisure venues are part of the newly reopened venue along with a shopping centre. One of those shops is the new LEGO Store, which features a unique monochrome logo to fit in with the station's aesthetic.

There are bespoke details inside that pay homage to the location, including a model of

Battersea Power Station and a 108,291 LEGO brick feature wall. Everything fans expect is there too – the full product range, exclusive sets, Build a Minifigure, Pick a Brick wall and hands-on build activities.

'We're always so excited to bring new LEGO Stores to local communities and it's very special to open this one in the iconic Battersea Power Station,' said Amy Pearson, Director, EMEA Marketing at LEGO Retail. 'We've had a fantastic response already.'

The products found inside the store are the same as those in every LEGO Store, but the feel is slightly different thanks to exposed brick walls and the unique layout that the historic building demands.

'As the LEGO Group's first store south of the River Thames, there has been much excitement locally around this opening,' said Sam Cotton, Head of Asset Management at Battersea Power Station Development Company. 'The building's presence throughout the store design with the big build of Battersea Power Station and interactive mosaic wall make it truly unique and a must visit for all LEGO fans of all ages.'

Fans who visited during the opening could get a Make and Take model of the power station.

The store has a bespoke mosaic.



Battersea Power Station is now open.



The store has a modified logo.

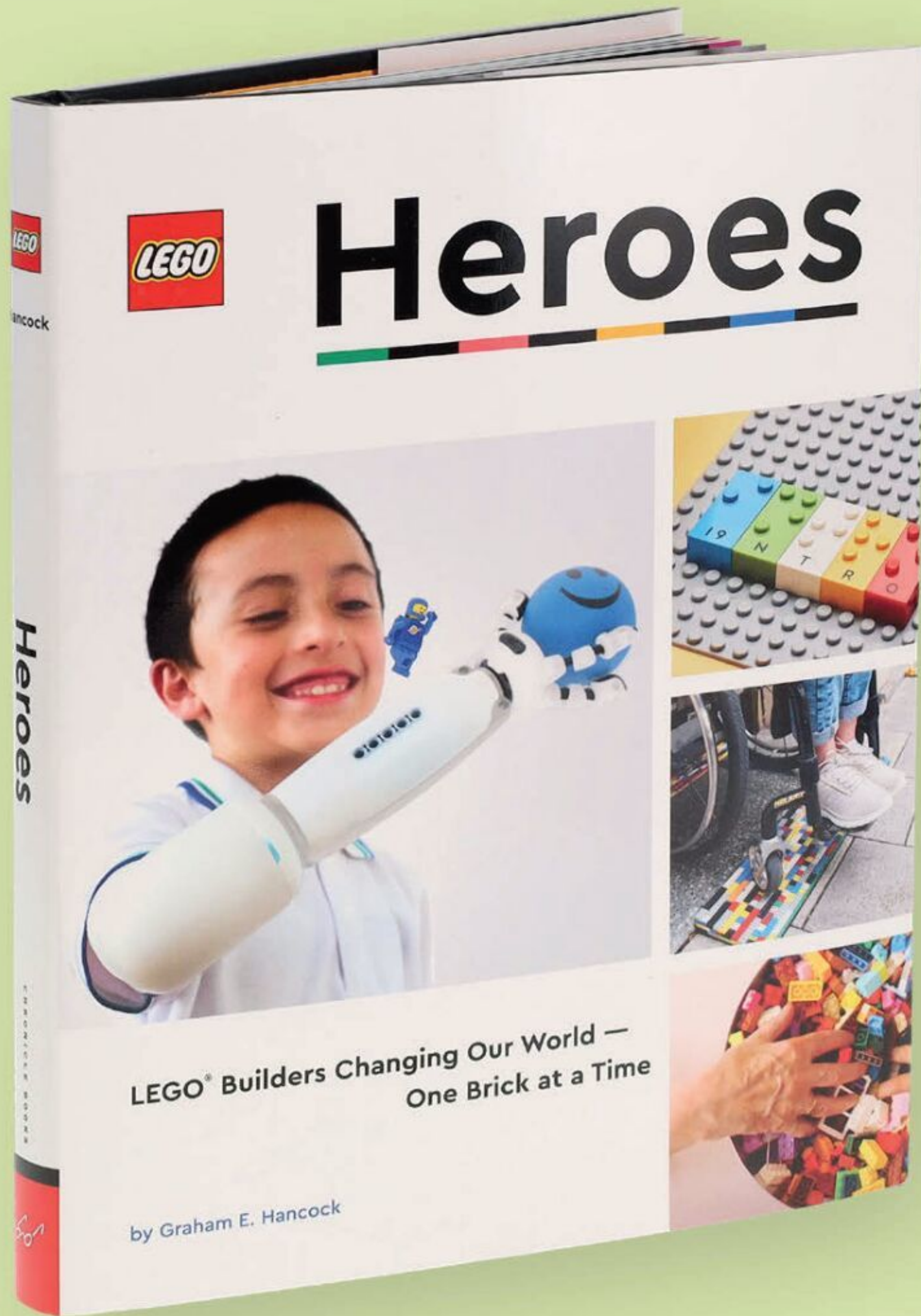


A miniature Battersea Power Station.



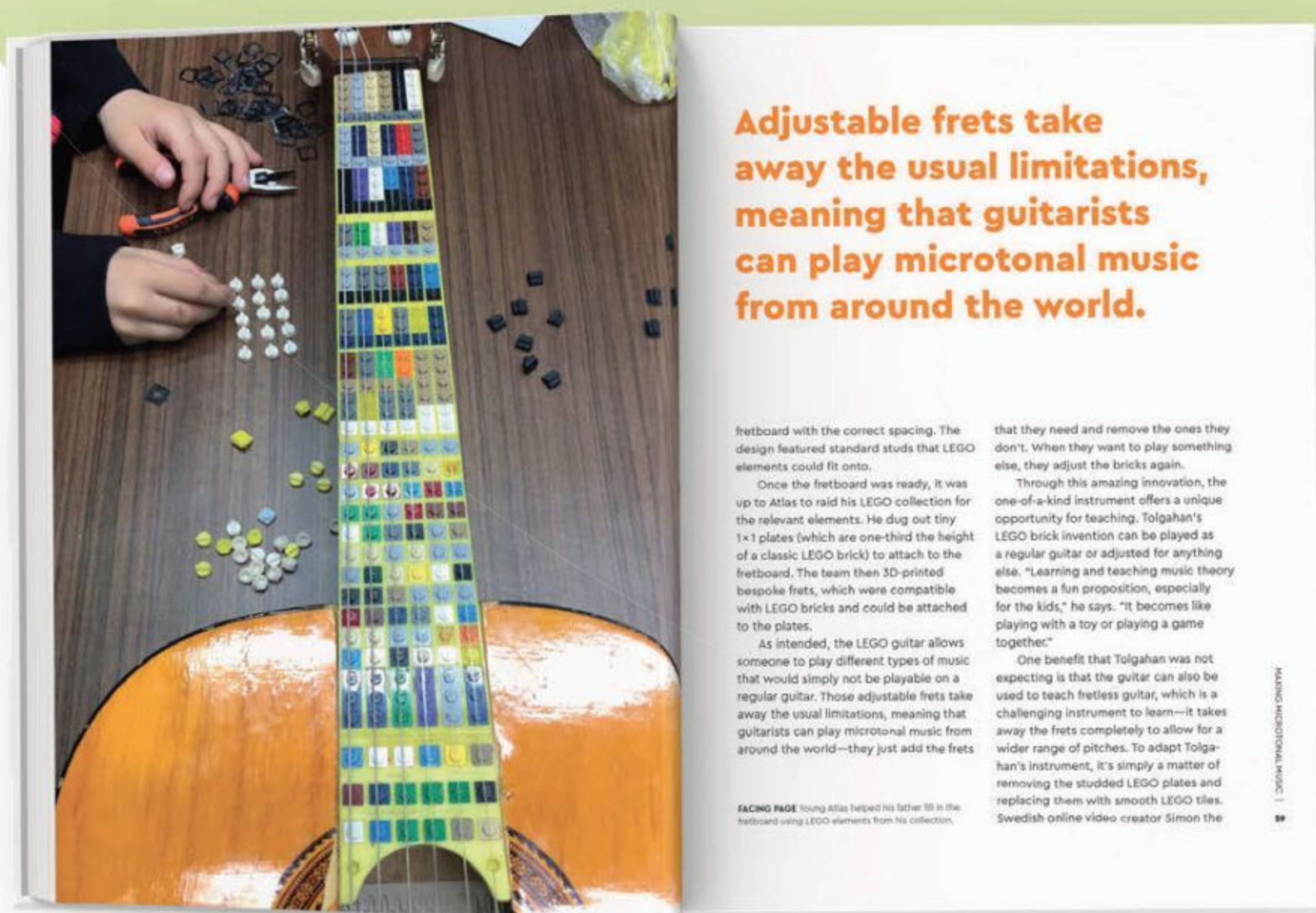
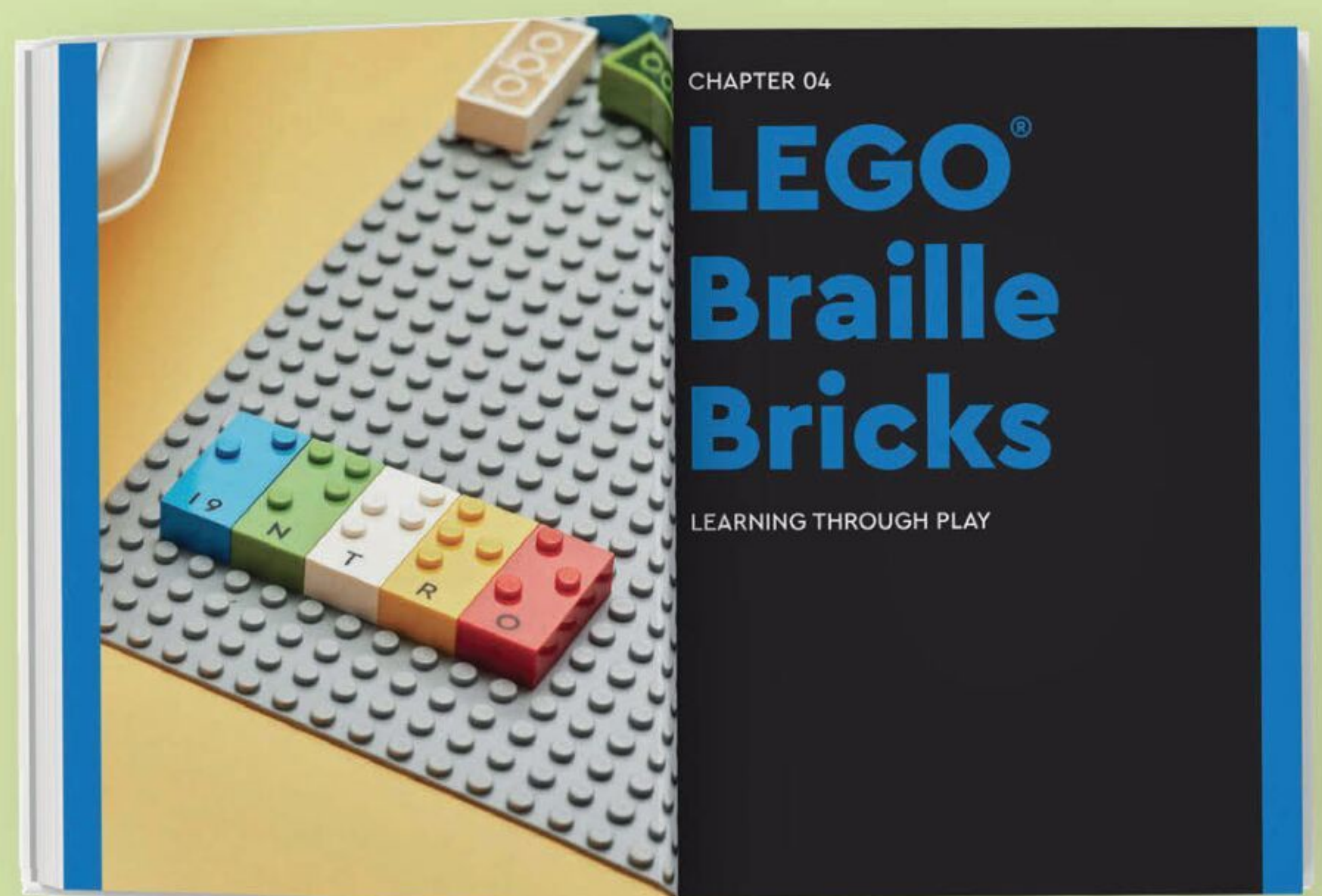
The unique architecture has been considered.





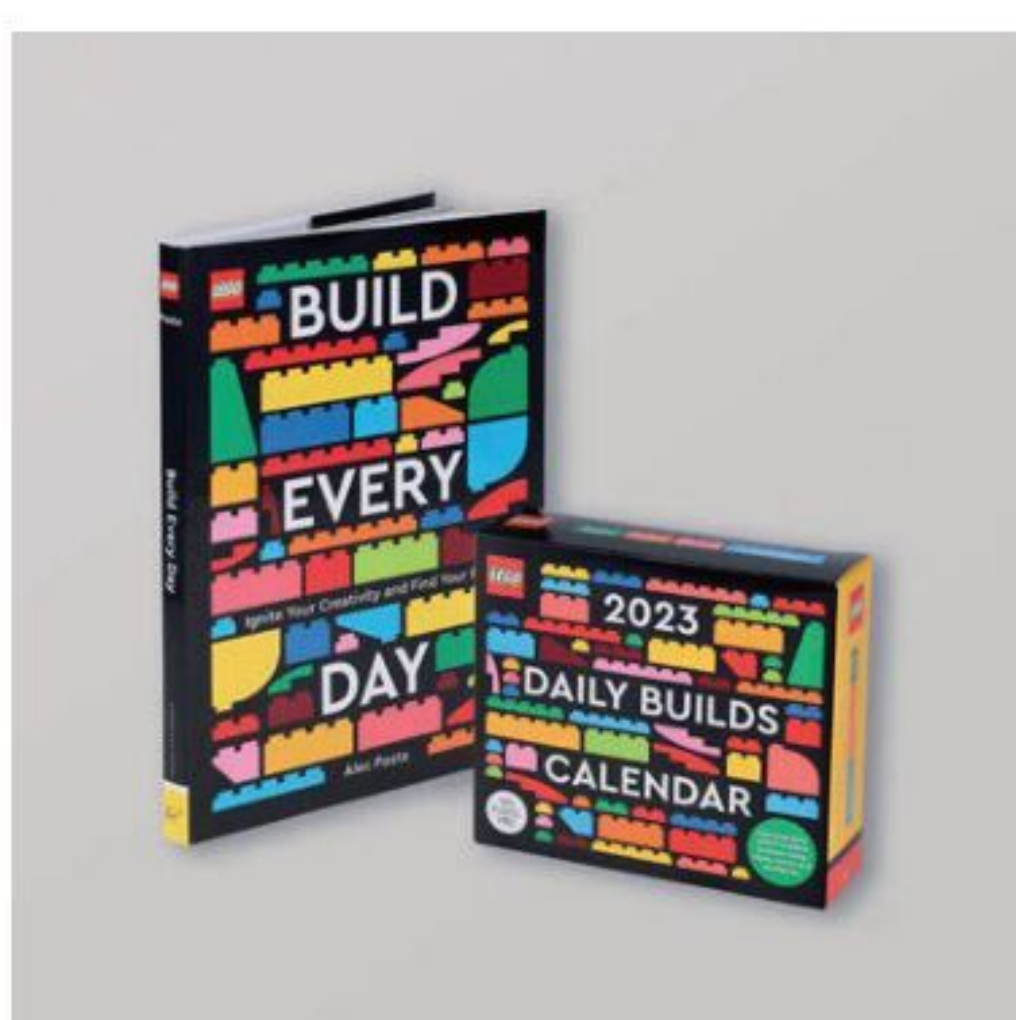
Meet 12 visionary builders who have turned LEGO® play into life-altering innovations

Scientists, designers, teachers, psychologists, artists, veterinarians, musicians—building a bridge to the future, one brick at a time



All share a drive to make the world a better—and more colourful—place and inspire the builders of tomorrow

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JØRN THOMSEN

One of the LEGO Group's most prolific model designers, who worked on many beloved themes and even had a minifigure named after him, passed away in March



Jørn Thomsen shows Carl Merriam and Daniel Meehan how it's done.

The wanted poster featuring Jørn's name.

JØRN THOMSEN, A LEGO designer with a career spanning decades, passed away in March 2023. He leaves a long, rich legacy of sets that defined childhoods around the world. During his career, Jørn played an instrumental role in establishing products for the AFOL community and was a key contributor to Mindstorms.

In 1987, Jørn Thomsen joined the LEGO Group as a designer in the 'Future Team', just as the Classic Space era was drawing to a close. One of his first contributions was helping to develop a new concept for Space, modelled on Town's repeating subthemes. He and the team envisioned repeating factions, much like Fire or Police, to be updated every few years. That was the reason Blacktron and Space Police had two iterations in the late 1980s and early 1990s before that strategy was abandoned in favour of one-off factions.

It wasn't long before he had established himself as a skilled set designer and was

responsible for many of Space's flagship sets during the early 1990s including M-Tron's 6989 Mega Core Magnetizer, Ice Planet's 6973 Deep Freeze Defender and Unitron's 6991 Monorail Transport Base.

As the name implies, the Future Team was tasked with developing ideas for all products with a futuristic angle. In addition to his work on Space, Jørn developed an underwater theme that could serve as a Space faction or as its own world. The product line was completely ready to go and slated for production in 1991, but was pulled at the last minute due to concerns it would cannibalise Space's successful sales. The theme was released as Aquazone in 1995, with Jørn responsible for most of the Aquanaut sets including 6195 Neptune Discovery Lab.

His impressive work on Aquazone did not go unnoticed. Jørn received an unexpected invitation to switch gears and join the Trains team. This required some juggling as he had also been

tapped to work on the Western theme that was in development. He worked on a host of concept models for Western, from which the final sets were selected.

Originally he had created a saloon that would have been the flagship model, but management instructed him to finalise a different model for the top spot, based on a classic fort. Almost all of the Western theme's products, including classics such as 6769 Fort Legoredo, 6765 Gold City Junction, 6766 Rapid River Village and 6784 Boulder Cliff Canyon, are Jørn's designs.

As if designing all those sets wasn't enough, his mark on Western goes even deeper. It was imperative to everyone involved in the project that clear distinctions between good guys and bad guys be drawn. Accordingly, the team received a generous budget for new prints on minifigures to unambiguously delineate the villainous bandits. That budget on prints meant that they couldn't produce as many new parts, such as a dynamite

element they had designed.

As part of this selection of printed parts, Jørn instructed his graphic designer to create a classic 'wanted' poster using one of the new bandit's faces. Striving for accuracy, the artist asked for a name for the bandit so it would look authentic. Thinking that typeface on a 1x2 tile would be way too small to read, he told the graphic designer to use his last name. The joke ended up being on Jørn, as that element featured in a large and prominent way in marketing materials, so everyone knew that the lead bandit was named Flatfoot Thomsen.

That earlier invitation to work on Trains served as the catalyst for the next phase of Jørn's career. As the LEGO Group's financial position collapsed in the late 1990s, Trains received fewer and fewer

**Jørn's namesake,
Flatfoot Thomsen.**



resources. However, a lack of official models requiring development meant he had time to experiment. He developed a variety of designs for various types of train engines and cars. His work ended up being exactly what the company needed as it became aware of a small but growing contingent of adult fans.

The earliest AFOLs were almost all train enthusiasts and the company was curious to test this market. Jørn's train designs ended up being perfect for this and were released as the My Own Train theme in 2001. Thanks to the success of those sets with the target audience of adults, more experiments were greenlit. Jørn went on to help develop both 10020 Santa Fe Super Chief, 10133 Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Locomotive and 10173 Holiday Train.

That final offering was voted the second-best LEGO model by Danish fans in 2006, a fact that Jørn was very proud of. Sales of those and other sets from this time convinced LEGO management to cater more directly to adult fans. There is a direct line between Jørn's work and the company introducing a distinctive adult product range in recent years.

Jørn Thomsen spent his final decade at the LEGO Group devoted to special projects, most notably as part of the Mindstorms team. He was involved with NXT, EV3, BOOST, 75253 Droid Commander and 51515 Robot Inventor (released in 2020). Designers working on complex sets often went to Jørn with seemingly unsolvable problems, as they knew he would always find a solution. ■

REMEMBERING JØRN

Veteran LEGO designer Bjarne P. Tveskov
pays tribute to his friend and colleague

I REMEMBER WHEN Jørn started in our design team in 1987. On his first or second day on the job he built a very clever spaceship with a ramp that could automatically swing down when the ship landed... an amazing start.

Not only was he a nice and fun guy to work with, he clearly had an incredible sense for building clever mechanisms and functions with LEGO elements. We both worked on the Space Police I models that launched in 1989 and Jørn's 6989 Mega Core Magnetizer (1990) is probably my all-time favourite Space model.

Over the years we quite often bumped into each other in the hallways of Innovation House. To have a proper coffee-chat with Jørn you had to set aside at least an hour or

■ HE WAS VERY FOCUSED ON BUILDING COOL LEGO MODELS ■

more, among many things he always had a lot of observations and strong opinions on the state of the LEGO building system and the company in general. Jørn was not a big fan of long meetings and paperwork and such, he was very focused on building cool LEGO models.

His knowledge of the LEGO System's mechanical possibilities and limits were second to none. At the same time, he was really great at making stable and attractive models with lots of playability.

In 2022 we worked together again on new activities and challenges for the 51515 LEGO Mindstorms set, with Jørn working on the model side and me focused on user experience and software. At the time it felt like coming full circle from the old LEGO Space days (even utilising the very same plastic wheels first used in the Space Police sets back in the 1980s).

We had fun doing that, and I often thought 'what a great way to spend a working day.' He is dearly missed.



START YOUR ENGINES

Merlin and Ferrari have collaborated to bring a racing themed experience to LEGOLAND Windsor Resort

Words: Graham E. Hancock **Pics:** Graham E. Hancock, LEGOLAND Windsor Resort

IF YOU REMEMBER visiting LEGOLAND Windsor Resort when it opened in the 1990s, you can probably recall building cars and sending them down ramps. Racing is an obvious thing to do with LEGO cars and this type of experience has been a LEGO classic for years.

The new attraction that the British theme park has opened takes the concept to the next level. Created in collaboration with Ferrari, Build and Race encourages guests to build a car, test it on different ramps and then send it around Pista di Fiorano racetrack.

It has also opened at LEGOLAND Billund recently, having debuted at LEGOLAND California Resort last year. That has allowed the team to optimise the experience, improving on the first version. 'The biggest tweak was turning the screen upright,' says Merlin Magic Making Creative Hannah Phizacklea. 'It was flat before and we realised that guests couldn't see over the top of it. So we turned it upright and

the screen is this amazing vista as you come into the attraction.'

As you enter the building, you come across a life-sized LEGO Ferrari. There's something unique about cars built from bricks – perhaps it's because you're so accustomed to seeing

YOU CAN MAKE THE MOST BIZARRE FERRARI CAR IN THE WORLD AND IT WILL SCAN

them every day that it's even more apparent that they shouldn't have studs on them at this size. The car is surrounded by racing paraphernalia, some of which is built from bricks. Ferrari's influence is clear, with facts and info on cars and races from over the years to absorb. Upscaled minifigures in authentic Ferrari outfits give the whole environment a

fun feel.

When you move through to the main area, that racetrack does indeed make it clear what your goal is. But first, it's time to head to a build station and put a car together. There are lots of red and black car elements to utilise, with instructions showing how to build three different Ferraris. These are nice, elegant looking cars – but of course you are also welcome to construct your own monstrosity.

Once your car is built, there are three test opportunities; the first is a straightforward speed test. How quickly can it descend a ramp? The timer will tell you the time it takes to get to the finish point.

The next, trickier one, is the jump test. You must release your car and hope it jumps through an oversized LEGO tyre. 'Guests constantly go back and try and work out how to make their car go through it,' Hannah explains. 'It's actually really tricky, I've only managed to get a car through it once.' This test encourages





Follow instructions or build your own car.



There are cars ready to go.



Time to test.



Your car races around Pista Di Fiorano.

you to modify your car and test again, with a slow-motion replay screen above showing how you do each time.

Next is the engine test, which sends your car under an oversized LEGO engine. It's not as clear what the purpose of this one is as the other tests, but sending cars down ramps is fun even when the reason is hazy. It's your final opportunity to be sure you're happy with the vehicle before the main event.

In one of the cleverest pieces of technology used for a LEGO experience yet, you can scan your car and send it around the digital/physical hybrid Pista di Fiorano racetrack. You just place the car in the slot, get some stats on it, tweak it digitally and then it's time to start.

What makes it so clever though is that even if you haven't followed the instructions, your car will be recognised by the scanner. 'Anything that you make will scan in there,' Hannah confirms. 'You can make the most bizarre Ferrari car in the world and it will scan as long as it's within the height requirement. We encourage the guest to use their imagination – if they can dream it, they can build it.'

An accurate digital recreation of your car leaves the garage and starts racing around the course, with two buttons giving you a small amount of control over the vehicle. You can switch lanes or boost, but otherwise you have to hope that your design was up to snuff to beat out the competition.

It's great to see a real building experience added to LEGOLAND. The only concern is that, unlike LEGO House, LEGOLAND Windsor Resort doesn't have the best track record of supervising and maintaining these hands-on attractions. If the relevant bricks are no longer available and the technology stops working, it will be a real shame.

If this is looked after though, guests will have great fun building LEGO cars and seeing who can get around the racetrack fastest. It's a classic concept with a very modern twist, bringing a fun, creative addition to the theme park. ■

Build, test and then race a car.



ANTHONY WALKER-COOK

MAKING NEW (LEGO) FRIENDS

Anthony explores how a recent build experience has changed his perspective on collecting LEGO sets

RECENTLY, I'VE had a bit of a brick-based revelation – the LEGO Friends theme is rather lovely, isn't it? A few months ago I was tasked with reviewing five of the new sets from the theme's recent reboot. I was so impressed with the sets it's got me thinking about what other LEGO themes I might have missed.

This isn't the first time this has happened when writing for Blocks – it's almost an occupational hazard that producing many Top 10 spreads over the past few years has led to exploring themes, sets and minifigures that I might have paid only a cursory glance to when they were first available.

However, the realisation that there's much more to LEGO Friends than meets the eye hits differently to seeing the odd set or minifigure and thinking 'oh, that's neat.' Of course, not judging a book by its cover is a lesson that we're all taught from the very beginnings of our lives, but in my defence LEGO Friends was at its inception a theme that was not targeted at me (when it began 10 years ago I was a man in my late teenage years; now I'm a man with grey hairs and a mortgage). Rather infamously, the theme unapologetically targeted the girls' market, with the pink colour scheme a particular sticking point for many who thought the first sets simply reinforced stereotypes.

Not to downplay these early criticisms, but the long-standing success of the LEGO Friends theme suggests that many fans have since changed their mind about it, which has also presented an ever-increasing variety of locales, careers and characters. Indeed, with the final group in particular, LEGO Friends has excelled – it celebrates diversity and acceptance and will continue to do so with new characters like Autumn and Jordin who were introduced in the theme's recent rejuvenation.

When it came to putting together the four new bedroom sets and 41729 Organic Grocery Store, I didn't know what to expect. On the boxes they all looked adorable, but they're hardly my usual choice of Star Wars spaceships or Harry Potter castles. And yet, as brick was clicked onto brick two things struck me – firstly, how much personality was included in each set and, then, the level of detail achieved.



ANTHONY WALKER-COOK

An eclectic collector with a penchant for Harry Potter, Anthony is always ready to talk about the LEGO hobby to anyone who'll listen.

I love spaceships and castles, but I'd never really thought that I wanted to build a LEGO supermarket. Maybe it's just my inevitable trudge into adulthood, but I'm immensely glad for the experience – building the mechanism for the automatic doors was a total but simple delight. I was totally taken by the aesthetic, both of this set and the others I was sent to review. Detailed thoughts can be found in the reviews (Issue 101), but the way in which every detail was created in a space that feels so familiar is truly lovely.

Maybe that's what my LEGO hobby has been missing – the everyday. Even building a photocopier and numerous desks for 21336 The Office was tinged with the knowledge that the set is based on a TV show that I treasure. But with LEGO Friends it's focused just on the build and the fresh creation of the personalities behind each mini-doll. The room sets in particular are all so individual and so easily create such

vibrant personalities, costing less than £20. At that price point you're lucky to get anything more than a cursory build and one interesting minifigure from certain licensed themes.

All of this has led me to one question – what other themes or sets have I missed over the years just because I judged them too quickly when they were first announced? The Elves theme has a similar appeal to Friends and The LEGO Batman Movie sets were all spectacular. However it's NINJAGO and Monkie Kid that strike me now as two themes that I've ignored to my own detriment. They represent something

I'D NEVER REALLY THOUGHT THAT I WANTED TO BUILD A SUPERMARKET

that's completely different to my usual choice in sets and embody their own independent looks and characters.

So herein lies the message. Push yourself. Yes, that's good advice for life in general, but it also applies to your LEGO hobby. Even if finances are tight, spend time looking at those themes you might not normally have given a second glance to – you might be surprised. I certainly was and look forward to any build experiences that might come about in the future because of this newfound enlightened state. ■

Bedroom sets are full of detail.





41731 Heartlake International School.



Every aspect of life is represented.



Charming houses are a hallmark of Friends.

KAT REES-JAUKE

THE REAL PRICE OF LEGO 2K DRIVE

LEGO 2K Drive is putting a new spin on brick-based video games in more ways than one, including controversial microtransactions

TYPICALLY LEGO VIDEO games are met with fan excitement. Who doesn't want to smash bricks and save the world as a minifigure? When 2K Drive was announced as a LEGO inspired kart racer, it certainly piqued the interest of many fans. Almost all previous LEGO video games have followed the same basic gameplay, just mixed up by different stories and filled with quintessential LEGO humour. So, 2K Drive promised to change things up a bit. Yet now that the video game is finally available, it seems to have divided LEGO fans.

This is mainly because of the microtransactions that feature in LEGO 2K Drive. What are microtransactions? For those who haven't played a video game with them before, then basically it's the same as an in-app purchase. Real money buys currency that can then be used in the game to purchase new items, avatars or customisation options. It's nothing new in the gaming world. Microtransactions have been around for quite a while and are part of some massive video game titles, including The Witcher, Fortnite and Star Wars: Battlefront II. Usually these microtransactions are more of a cosmetic thing, but there are some games that use them to hide certain levels or make the game only possible to play through frequent purchases.

LEGO 2K Drive is not one of those games, yet it is still frustrating many fans. This is likely because one of the key features of this game is its customisation options. Players can build their own vehicles, change paint jobs and even add digital stickers onto a massive selection of rides. Yet some of these customisations require in-game currency known as brick-bux. This doesn't pose a problem to begin with, as story mode lets players earn enough to buy extras for customisation, but other items cost far more than could be earned even after hours of gameplay.

I've played 2K Drive for the Blocks review (see page 52) and after several hours of gameplay, I have just over 4,000 brick-bux. To put this into perspective, a new avatar would cost around 10,000 brick-bux in the store. For all the effort players put into story mode and bonus missions, the rewards are pretty slim. I've mentioned avatars specifically because the starting roster in the Awesome Edition is only 10 characters, none of



KAT REES-JAUKE

Part of the Blocks review team, Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets.

which can be customised to look like you and they are a pretty limited range. To get a new character would require a microtransaction of £4.49 (\$5.99), just to be able to get a better avatar.

And the avatars are one of the cheaper options. There are a bunch of different vehicles that cost around triple the brick-bux, which is around £14, not to mention the time-limited purchases that

IT'S BASICALLY LIKE 2K DRIVE HAS A DIGITAL TOY STORE

change every week. These special items are around 22,000-33,000 brick-bux, creating FOMO (fear of missing out). While it may be quite easy for an adult to budget these microtransactions, or ignore them altogether, a game like LEGO 2K Drive should be accessible and these microtransactions might alienate younger players.

Younger players will definitely be more tempted by the cool looking avatars and the really cool looking new vehicles. It's basically like 2K Drive has a digital toy store. It puts huge strain on adults to either have to tell children that they can't purchase something or to have to continuously limit online spending. While it's possible to set up purchase

limits on console related accounts, this type of control shouldn't be needed on a game that is aimed primarily at children (it's PEGI 7 after all). Not to mention it could create divides amongst peers or friends, with some children able to spend more in the game than others. This has never been a problem for previous LEGO video games.

Past titles have only ever had downloadable content, known as DLC for short, which usually adds a few more characters to play as within the game. When LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga was released, only a few weeks later it had a DLC for the new characters that had just arrived in Kenobi on Disney+. Although DLCs also cost money, they are typically less frequent purchases. By comparison, LEGO 2K Drive has new items every week and there will potentially be more special purchases for holidays throughout the year. These microtransactions add up quickly on top of the initial game purchase.

This is a shame because there has clearly been a lot of dedication and LEGO love put into 2K Drive. Those microtransactions could easily have been replaced with rewards for completing bonus missions instead. Gaming enthusiasts won't be surprised by the microtransactions, but for casual LEGO fans then this new style of video game may not gain the loving support that previous titles have achieved. ■



Kat wishes her minifigure had purple hair.

A small amount of brick-bux are hidden at each location.

COLLECT 16 FLAGS!

Glazed-Overdrive

Meatless Monsters



Big Butte Town
Downtown

UNKIE'S EMPORIUM

HOME

STORE

LEGO OFFICIAL

PREMIUM DRIVE PASS

TRADE CENTER

430

KYLE ARSON

LORD BEN

HOT SEAT (BLACK)

BUNDLES

4d 19m

SUPER SCIENCE BUNDLE

9600

TRAFFIC CONES BUNDLE

22400

UP IN FLAMES BUNDLE

17600

WEEKLY

4d 19m

It takes a long time to earn currency.

PREVIEW

REDEEM CODE

10000

UNKIE'S EMPORIUM

HOME

STORE

LEGO OFFICIAL

PREMIUM DRIVE PASS

TRADE CENTER

450

FEATURED

6d 1h 22m

DISCO CIRCUS BALL

6000

JUSTA PLANE BOAT

20000

MODEL CAT-T

14000

BUNDLES

6d 1h 22m

BACK

MORE FUNDS

PREVIEW

REDEEM CODE

14400

25600

8000

These change weekly.

UNKIE'S EMPORIUM

HOME

STORE

LEGO OFFICIAL

PREMIUM DRIVE PASS

TRADE CENTER

450

@MOODRANGER

NEAT

2,000

PURCHASE

ALL

STREET

OFF-ROAD

WATER

DRIVERS

FLAIR

STICKERS

BRICK P

@MOODRANGER

2000

ADJUNCT PROFESSOR

4000

ALFRED

4000

ALYSSA

4000

BIG BILLY

2000

BILL BEASTMODE

6000

BRUISER

6000

BACK

PURCHASE

PREVIEW

REDEEM CODE

SORT : NAME (A-Z)

It's not the best selection.

DANIEL KONSTANSKI

DO YOU ACCEPT REPUBLIC CREDITS?

Daniel wonders why the dioramas are so much more expensive than other LEGO Star Wars sets

UPON SEEING THE inaugural wave of LEGO Star Wars diorama sets last year, my initial reaction was 'wow, those are expensive'. Granted, they have a lot of pieces; 75330 Dagobah Jedi Training contains 1,000 elements, while the rest have averaged between 600 and 800, but almost all of those parts are small and none of the final models are large – that would defeat their purpose as display models.

The release of 75352 Emperor's Throne Room Diorama and 75353 Endor Speeder Chase Diorama a couple of months ago only cemented this feeling that the Diorama Collection is an expensive one.

Even accounting for licensing fees, price tags for both the 2022 and 2023 waves seem outrageous at first glance. What is going on here? It was with this question in mind that I recently took a close look at these products to see if I could come up with a plausible explanation.

The first thing to understand is how the LEGO Group manages its inventory of stock. Manufacturing and packing are two separate processes within the company that, while not independent of one another, operate on separate schedules and timeframes. For every part, there is a lag period between when it is manufactured and when it is sorted and bagged into a set.

During that interim, each and every component must be stored. Some parts will be called upon quickly, while others will need to wait months. That storage has a physical and monetary cost; capital was expended to make those parts and construct the warehouses. Each second elements sit in storage delays the LEGO Group's return on those investments. The fewer sets a part appears in, the longer it will sit in the warehouse.

High end offerings like these are meant to be pieces for collectors, not playsets. Accordingly, they need to offer something special – and these dioramas do. Specifically, they include both unique printed elements and exclusive minifigures. As soon as those 2x6 tiles get printed, they are stored in a separate storage bin that will only be called upon for a single product run. Each unique minifigure part does the same.



DANIEL KONSTANSKI

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.

Compared to a City set, which is comprised of pieces that appear across dozens of models, there is a huge difference in the time between the production of the elements and date of sale for these parts. These storage costs are a sort of rent within the warehouse. Consumers are paying for that rent in the eventual purchase price of the set.

This phenomenon can be seen in action by comparing two sets within the diorama line

THE FEWER SETS A PART APPEARS IN, THE LONGER IT WILL SIT IN THE WAREHOUSE

itself; 75329 Death Star Trench Run and 75353 Endor Speeder Chase. These two sets have similar part counts – 665 for 75329 and 608 for 75353. However, despite having almost 60 more components, the Trench Run costs £59.99 whereas Endor costs £69.99. Why that discrepancy? While both have exclusive printed tiles, the latter has exclusive minifigures while the former does not. Apparently, £10 is the cost to manufacture, print and then store the parts for those characters.

Collectible minifigures and printed parts

are likely to be a big part of the explanation. However, in the words of Yoda, 'there is another'. Certain LEGO sets appeal to different groups of people. I adore the Jurassic World/Jurassic Park line thanks to a potent mix of nostalgia and love of dinosaurs but have never purchased a single Minecraft set, which appeals to children today who have grown up playing the game.

Many fans are even narrower with their collecting, perhaps focusing on only one line of products. Certain themes are going to have a wider appeal than others. City is relatable to nearly every child on the planet, while Technic's appeal is more limited. In practice, this means that the potential market for City products is going to be larger than that of Technic, so the LEGO Group should make more City sets than Technic sets. Since production space is limited, making one set means that another can't be made. Sets with smaller appeal are keeping something else with broader appeal from being made and must be priced accordingly. Star Wars sets targeted at collectors, not children, occupy that space.

These two aspects are likely driving factors in the pricing of these Star Wars Diorama Collection sets. Buying a high-end adult product tends to cost more than a toy and what goes into making adult LEGO sets accentuates that price discrepancy even further. Considering a second wave of these sets has now been released, it seems that the cost was not high enough to scare everybody away. ■

The back-printed R2-D2 is only used in 'premium' sets.



Even when compacted, every part counts.



Fewer unique parts, lower price.



Unique minifigures adds expense to sets like this.



Words: Anthony Walker-Cook

BUILDING THE BRICK CLASSICISTS EMPIRE

Liam Jensen explains to Blocks how he is using LEGO bricks to bring attention to the study of the ancient world – with minifigures of scholars like Dame Mary Beard and Professor Michael Scott





Liam Jensen. Photo: Andriana Simos HR for the Greek Herald, Australia.



Liam's studio celebrates the BCE inductees.

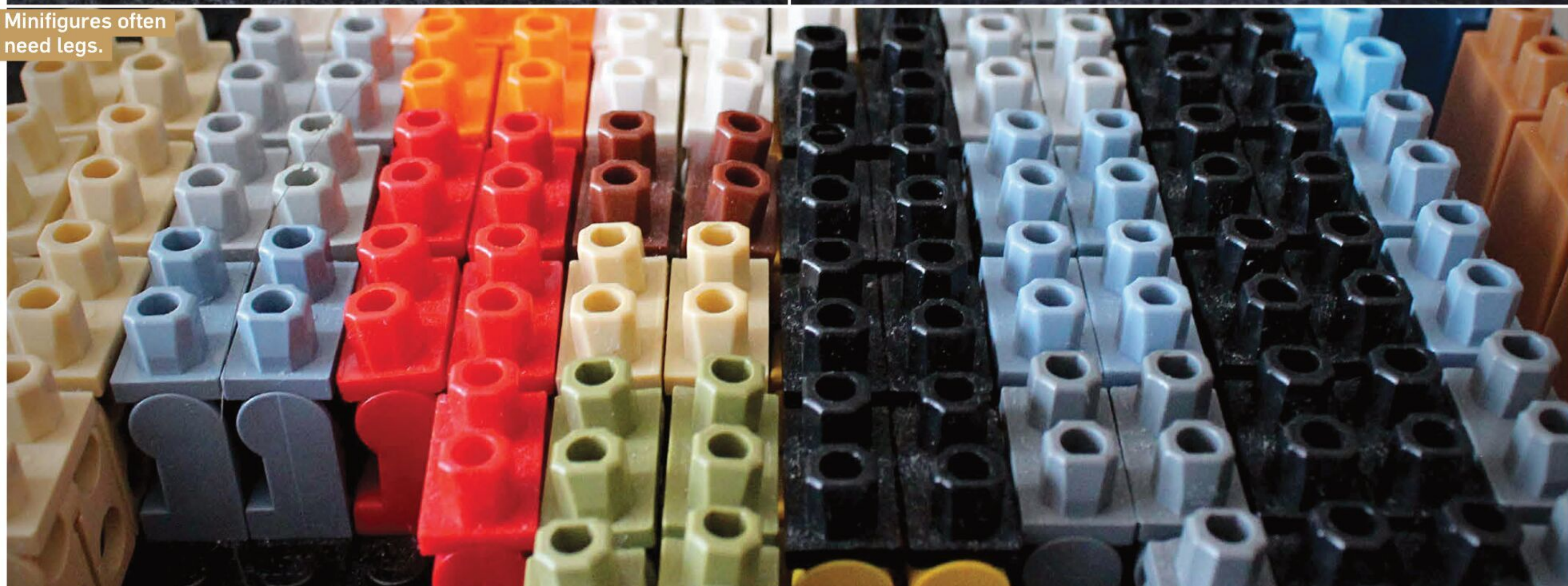
Minifigure faces are always on hand.



Lots of wigs to choose from.



Minifigures often need legs.



IN CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY, the Gorgon Medusa transformed her victims into stone with a steely glare. Liam Jensen, the curator of the Brick Classicists Empire (or BCE) and a historical archivist, has a rather different idea in mind, turning those who disseminate the ancient world into LEGO minifigures. Since the Brick Classicists Empire project started in 2016, almost 150 individuals have received the minifigure treatment.

Liam grew up surrounded by the ancient world (that is, the worlds of Greece and Rome, although other world civilisations such as Egypt are also included within this term). His mother taught ancient history and Greek pottery, so Cycladic statues and books were readily available in the family home. Even the cat was named Socrates.

The archivist also spent half a year living in Greece – aged six at the time, he remembers ‘playing in the ancient ruins, picnicking in the walls of Tiryns and under the arch at Naxos [and] running around the stadium at Olympus.’ Combined with a long-seated love of LEGO bricks – he was given 3625 Sandy Seagull’s Aeroplane the day his younger brother was born, while Castle and Forestmen were childhood favourites – and an artistic family, and it seems that it was inevitable that he would find a way of combining bricks with the classics in later life.

ACCESSING THE CLASSICS

In the UK, the study of the classics and the ancient world has been on the wane, necessitating schemes like the Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project Advocating Classics Education (ACE) that are attempting to keep the study of the Greek and Roman civilisations on school curricula in the state sector.

There’s a somewhat different attitude towards the classics in Australia, where Liam lives and was born – since the 1970s ancient history has been an increasingly popular school subject. Liam gives two potential reasons for this. ‘Australians seem to resonate with the stories, personalities and lessons of the classical ancient world, and this might be related to living on a very ancient continent where European settlement is very recent,’ he says. ‘Australians also have a strong egalitarian streak, so the tendency to equate scholarship with class is not so prevalent here.’

Even within this context, it’s vital to remember that the history and culture of the ancient world are to be found throughout modern society, whether it be in the critically and commercially successful God of War videogame series (which sees Spartan Kratos methodically work his way through the

gods and creatures of Greek mythology) or the ever-popular Percy Jackson & the Olympians book series by Rick Riordan that’s currently being adapted as a streaming series for Disney+. ‘These stories are deeply embedded throughout modern culture,’ Liam says. ‘They are important and relevant because we live them every day. They are at

the bedrock of our modern societies across the world.’

BRICK CLASSICISTS ARE CHOSEN BECAUSE THEY COME TO MY ATTENTION IN SOME WAY

MINIFIGURE ACCOLADE

The Brick Classicists Empire focuses on the accessibility of academic research and uses LEGO bricks as a way of making the classics open to everyone, regardless of their background. All of which leads to a vital question – how does one become a Brick Classicist?

‘To this day,’ Liam explains, ‘Brick Classicists are chosen because they come to my attention in some way, either through reading about them or watching documentaries, or being suggested to me by my followers, friends



Liam designing a torso. Photo: Andriana Simos HR for the Greek Herald, Australia.

and other BCE members. Underlying all choices is the aim to provide gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness, because BCE believes that everyone can and should be able to engage with the ancient world.'

There are three categories – Brick Classicists (those who work in the study of classics), honorary Brick Classicists (those who preserve, present and engage in ancient history, for example actors who have played famous historical figures) and honourable mention Brick Classicists (those with a passion for ancient history and who are connected to its study and engagement). At the heart of the project, Liam summarises, is a 'light-hearted, ironic yet serious' ethos.

At the time of writing there are 139 Brick Classicists. Included within their ranks are figures from history (the poet Lord Byron and Albert, son of Queen Victoria), celebrities who are unsurprising (Stephen Fry's books retell various myths and legends for modern audiences) and celebrities who are surprising (Barack Obama and Arnold Schwarzenegger). There are academics, curators, authors and a variety of other roles that are all held by individuals who are dedicated to, in whatever way they can, sharing news about the ancient world.

When asked if there are any standout Brick Classicists (largely an impossible question), Liam selects three figures who, in their eclectic range, superbly capture the wide scope of the BCE project – Dame Mary Beard, Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge, 'whose outreach work has bridged a big gap between the relevance of the ancient world and its importance to modern life'; Dr Stéphanie-Anne Ruatta, the ancient historian who works for Ubisoft Quebec on their popular Assassin's Creed Odyssey and Immortal Fenix Rising games; and Adam Savage, one half of the MythBusters duo (with Jamie Hyneman) whose television show put popular myths, rumours and movie scenes to the test with a scientific rigour during

the course of 282 episodes between 2003 and 2018.

Each Brick Classicist receives a physical minifigure. More recent minifigures have torsos that are designed by Liam using Adobe Illustrator and then printed onto genuine LEGO pieces. Indeed, the BCE project has received increasing attention and reputation and February 20, which marks the inauguration of the BCE, is now marked as the annual International LEGO Classicism Day. Looking ahead, Liam wants to grow BCE and make it a resource for both academics and the general public – other plans include providing funding to those looking to disseminate information about the ancient world and organise conferences for the same purpose. 'The goal of the Brick Classicists Empire is always to celebrate the joy of playing with history and the human experience that LEGO so powerfully symbolises,'

Liam stresses.

THE GOAL OF THE BRICK CLASSICISTS EMPIRE IS ALWAYS TO CELEBRATE THE JOY OF PLAYING WITH HISTORY

SHARING THE PAST

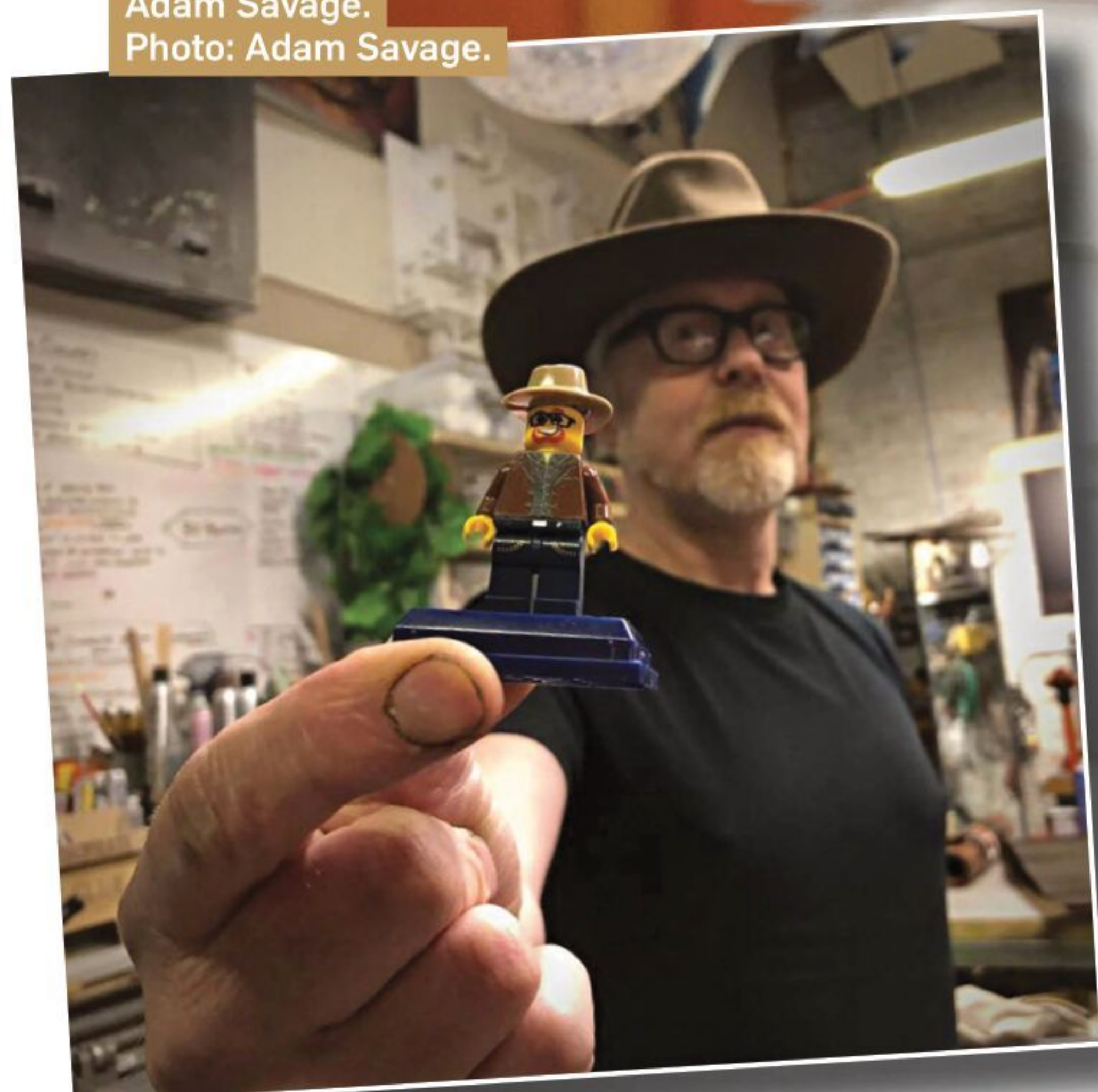
It'll come as no surprise that Liam believes in the inherent ability for LEGO bricks to be used as a tool to educate others about the classics. 'Because LEGO is so approachable, relatable and engaging, LEGO sets and figures that relate to history and the ancient

world can provide a very powerful way to engage a general audience and to provide context, understanding and empathy about the past, including the ancient world.'

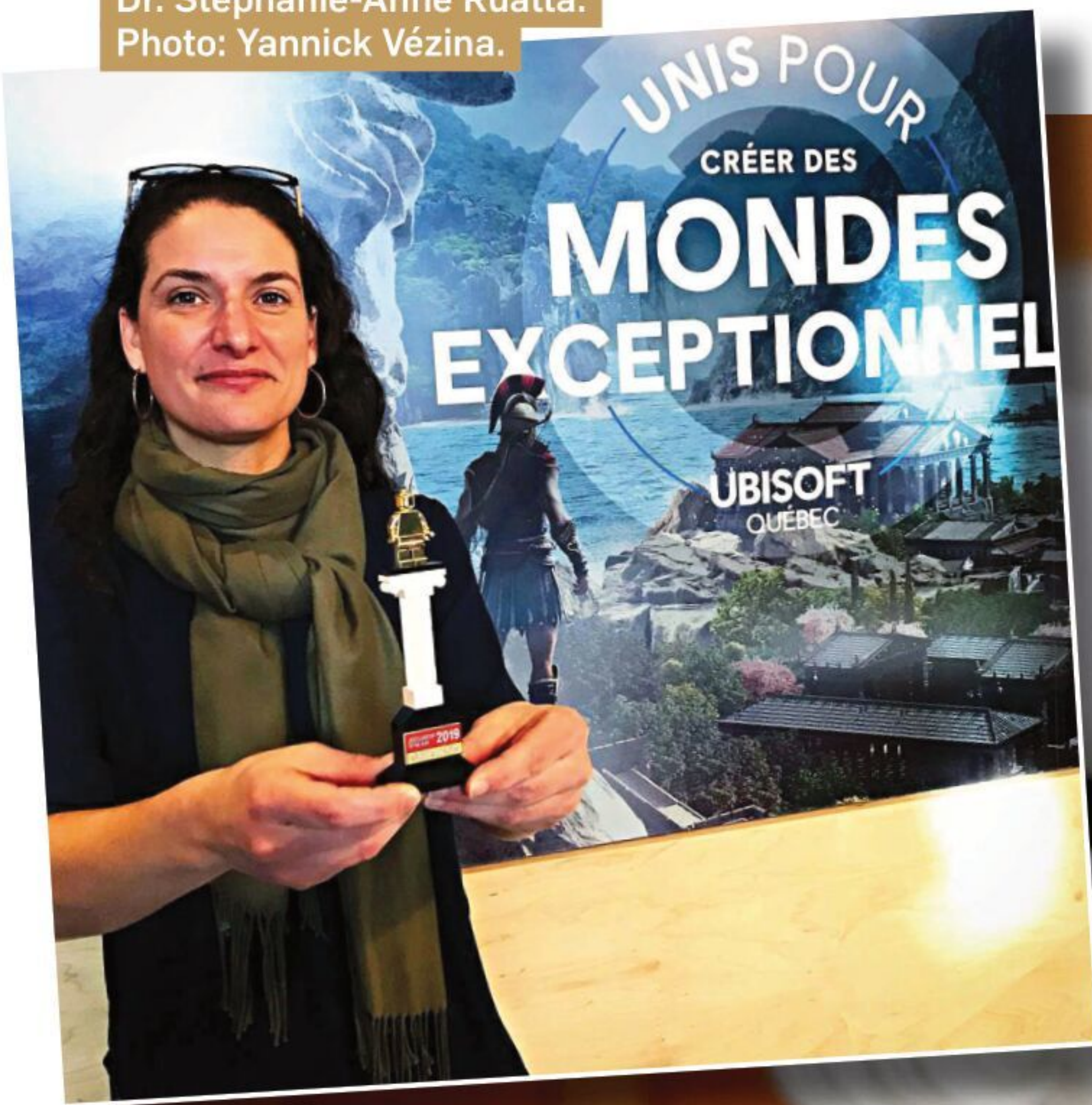
Liam believes LEGO bricks work as a natural metaphor for the study of history as a subject. 'The LEGO brick itself reflects the process and nature of both history, which builds, de-constructs and re-constructs, reforming itself into different shapes and structures, as well as the way historians themselves work, piecing historical evidence together to build different pictures and theories, then deconstructing and changing them, according to new evidence as it comes to light. Therefore for the Brick Classicists Empire,

Adam Savage, BCE edition.

Adam Savage.
Photo: Adam Savage.



Dr. Stéphanie-Anne Ruatta.
Photo: Yannick Vézina.



Dr. Stéphanie-Anne Ruatta, but smaller.



The real Professor Michael Scott.

Professor Michael Scott.
Photo: Michael Scott.



Lord Byron has been inducted into the BCE.



Dame Mary Beard.
Photo: Debbie Whittaker.



Agatha Christie has been included in the BCE.



using LEGO for historical purposes is a metaphor for the practice of the history discipline and the comings and goings of the changing and evolving realities of history itself.'

Others have found ways to combine LEGO bricks and the classics – Professor Michael Scott (who received the accolade of Brick Classicist in 2019) made a LEGO model of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi to support his architectural understanding of the building during his doctoral studies. There's also the potential for public engagement work; LEGO Certified Professional Ryan McNaught built models of the Acropolis and the Roman city of Pompeii, which are now held at the Acropolis Museum and University of Sydney respectively.

The LEGO Group has never moved towards the ancient worlds of Greece and Rome as the sources for a larger theme. There have been a few relevant Collectible Minifigures over the years. The Roman Soldier (Series 6), Roman Commander (Series 10) and Spartan Warrior (Series 2) made for popular army building minifigures. There has also been a Julius Caesar-inspired Roman Emperor (Series 9) and an Egyptian Queen (series 5) whose accompanying asp accessory suggests she's the famous Cleopatra.

However, it has been an area that the LEGO Group has mostly steered clear from when other competitors have dipped their toe more substantially in the waters of the ancient world. Playmobil's History subtheme, for example, has included Alexander the Great, the Greek hero Achilles, the Persian conqueror Xerxes and a figure series of the Greek pantheon alongside various sets from mythology, including a particularly grand Palace

on Mount Olympus.

'Maybe the LEGO Group feels that children would not engage as well with ancient history?' Liam speculates. 'I would totally argue that is not true, as every year I am sent photos of classical themed LEGO models made by kids and often told by their parents how much they love ancient history (for example this year as part of International LEGO Classicism Day, I was contacted by a mother who asked if her 11 year old son could join in as he loves Ancient Greek legends), so I think there is a big gap here.'

It's also worth remembering that there is some precedent for epic builds of the ancient world – 2020's 10276 Colosseum was, when it was released, the largest LEGO set ever – and so perhaps Liam's dream of seeing the Parthenon as a stupendous LEGO set might one day become reality.

Of course, having a detailed knowledge of the classical world can feel like a niche area (the Parthenon, for reference, is a temple in Athens that was dedicated to the goddess Athena), especially in the UK where the classics continue to feel like the preserve of the social elite.

Yet Liam insists that using LEGO bricks as a way of sharing this knowledge works well due to the brand's worldwide familiarity – minifigures '[represent] all of us, no matter where we are from, what gender we are or how old we are. Because of its beautiful design simplicity, everyone is able to relate to it,' whilst the bricks '[ignite] in us a sense of child-like joy, which is also what scholars feel when they are working on their subject. We are all children of LEGO.' ■

THE LEGO BRICK ITSELF REFLECTS THE PROCESS AND NATURE OF HISTORY ■■

Historical figures like Prince Albert are included too.



Prince Philip as a BCE character.



Get your coins ready.



Words: Anthony Walker-Cook **Pics:** The LEGO Group

DESIGNING AN ARCADE CLASSIC

Designer Sven Franic was tasked with turning the iconic PAC-MAN into a LEGO set – a challenge that had him refining functions and capturing the game's unique aesthetic

PAC-MAN BURST HUNGRILY onto the gaming market with a single arcade machine in a cinema in Shibuya, Tokyo, on May 22, 1980. The game, which was published by Namco Limited (the company would merge with toy company Bandai in 2005 to form Bandai Namco), launched in the United States in October the same year, where it rose to stratospheric, gaming-industry-changing heights. That's pretty impressive given that it was designed by 24-year-old Toru Iwatani, who was (supposedly) inspired by the shape of a pizza that was missing a slice.

The game's premise is simple. You play as PAC-MAN, a circle with a mouth who is on the hunt for pac-dots that are littered throughout various sprawling mazes. However, you're not alone, with four ghosts (Inky, Blinky, Pinky, Clyde for English audiences; Fickle, Chaser, Ambusher and Stupid for Japanese players) hunting you down – if you're caught, it's game over, unless you've managed to eat a power pellet that, for a short period, not only turns the ghosts blue but also makes them edible.

PAC-MAN's original name was Puckman, which came from the Japanese onomatopoeic phrase 'paku', which means 'to chomp'. The shift came when Puckman went global and American marketeers were concerned that the word 'Puck' was dangerously close to a four-letter expletive that has less-than-savoury connotations in the West.

Naming issues aside, the game was a hit, no doubt in part due to its democratic nature – there's no language barrier, with the human impulse to satiate a hunger motivating the central character – and gameplay that's easy to pick up (albeit hard to master). It is also a (relatively) non-violent videogame, a rare thing in a 1980s gaming industry that still took much inspiration from the two World Wars that occurred earlier in the century. Given the game's iconic status, it's of little surprise that PAC-MAN has now received the brick treatment thanks to Designer Sven Franic in the form of 10323 PAC-MAN Arcade.

🧱 PAC-MAN JUST MADE SENSE – THE 1980s NOSTALGIA WAS WHAT WE WANTED TO CREATE 🧱

LEGO GAMES

The set comes amidst a steady stream of LEGO sets based on games and gaming consoles – for the former, you might think of the Super Mario or Sonic themes, whilst for the latter there's 10306 Atari 2600 and 71374 Nintendo Entertainment System. But when the LEGO Group started to consider what would be the most iconic retro gaming intellectual property to be made into a LEGO set, there was only ever one option. Sven says: 'PAC-MAN just made sense – the 1980s nostalgia was what we wanted to create.'

Yet the connection between PAC-MAN and LEGO bricks goes back to the former brand's inception – during the development with Bandai Namco, Sven learned that PAC-MAN's yellow colour was inspired by the colour of the bricks.

For many, playing videogames at work would be a dream come true and for Sven 'research' for this project meant playing lots of PAC-MAN. 'I grew up in the 1990s, so I knew the game of course and was acquainted with it, but I wasn't a superfan,' he says.

'It plays to people's childhoods and spending time at the arcade. There were other games that were popular of course, but the aesthetic of PAC-MAN meant it was an obvious choice for us.'

Another part of Sven's research process was exploring how the cabinets were designed for different markets. The PAC-MAN character and logo mean different things to people of different ages, genders (it was originally designed to appeal to girls, although has proven strikingly gender neutral) and nationalities, all of which meant the pressure was on to create a LEGO set that faithfully paid homage to the love that the brand has garnered over the decades.

A-MAZE-ING DESIGN

The set builds on its Atari and Nintendo predecessors by including both the game and a console, but this time it's a model of an arcade machine that measures over 30cm in height and 25cm in width. The decision to do PAC-MAN came first, without the larger arcade cabinet. 'There was the idea of having more focus on the maze and the iconography of PAC-MAN,' he says. 'But then we went back to the arcade as that offered the functionality that we were looking for.'

'There was a lot of discussion around size. We didn't want to make it too large in case there was a lot of wasted space. It was all about condensing the set so that it kept the function but with a smaller footprint. It was the minimal amount of space that we needed to have the functions come alive.'

Movable functions have been achieved in this style of set before – cranking a lever on the side of the television unit in 71374 Nintendo Entertainment System, for example, sees Mario overcoming an obstacle course. The PAC-MAN set takes a massive leap forward, with the arcade screen depicting a game of PAC-MAN in full flow – turning a lever causes the ghosts to pursue the antagonist.

Unsurprisingly, it was this famous maze that proved the biggest challenge

to Sven and the design team. 'The maze took about 80 percent of the whole development, if not more,' Sven explains. 'Characters have to turn corners sharply and appear as if they're moving in a zig-zag.'

'We wanted to have movement in the maze, as that's the main part of the game and that's what you're immersed in. James May, who worked on [21327] Typewriter, made a larger model that had the functions but that was large and clunky. It gave us an idea of what we could do and we developed it from there. We were committed to doing an arcade.'

'The initial concept that James built used a chain of Technic 1x2 beams was large, bulky, couldn't take sharp corners and was propelled by gears (it used wheels and tyres). That was quite a chunky thing to go around, but it did have connectivity to the characters. We then contacted element development to figure out if we can make a connection point on the chain.'

The solution? A new chain link piece with a shaft that connects to the various flat, round tiles on which PAC-MAN, the ghosts and some tasty fruit are printed. Unfortunately the alternative blue ghost designs are not also printed on these tiles

as there's no easy way of changing them, but compromises have to be made somewhere.

WE WENT BACK TO THE ARCADE AS THAT OFFERED THE FUNCTIONALITY THAT WE WERE LOOKING FOR

TECHNIC-AL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

It will be no surprise that the maze went through many iterations. A relatively new Technic panel, 6441097, saved the day. 'The first iterations had more gears, which pulled the chain through harder. We realised we needed a drive chain and the rest could be pulleys, which relaxed the tension on the chain and made everything run much more smoothly,' Sven elaborates.

'Looking at the grid of the maze, it's even in one dimension and uneven in another dimension and it's quite unusual as it's 19x22, but the Technic plate is 19x11 – combining two plates matched the grid perfectly, which

Pressing the button lights up the slot.



The 1980s classic is delivered as a LEGO set.



was a great coincidence. Finding out I could use the plate was a big deal and afforded us fitting things snugly on.'

Functionality and robustness were key parts of the puzzle – if studs became dislodged and then jammed, the function wouldn't work, whilst the layering of the peg boards was tricky.

Sven's previous work includes 10300 Back to the Future Time Machine. Moving from vehicles to a retro arcade, however, was not a big concern for this builder. 'I love functions. If there is something to solve, I'll be happy; my mum was always angry at me for taking things apart because I wanted to see how they work. If there's a function, I'm in.'

'I like the PAC-MAN build. From the technical side, I'm quite happy that inside there's a single rail that controls multiple functions. I love simplicity in functions and creating the illusion that something big is happening but it's actually quite simple. "Simplify, simplify" is a school of learning that I've taken from Mike Psiaki – it's the best advice ever.'

'I feel like the main function is not super apparent when you're first introduced to the product. Obviously we can't have animation on a box, so the magical part of the set is in that maze function.'

I LOVE FUNCTIONS. IF THERE IS SOMETHING TO SOLVE, I'LL BE HAPPY

BONUS LEVELS

Of course, whilst the maze is an impressive technical feat, there's plenty of other features to whet the nostalgic appetite of PAC-MAN fans in this set. Take, for instance, the diorama on top of the cabinet that captures PAC-MAN, Blinky and Clyde – with a flick of the switch, the ghosts spin around and become blue as PAC-MAN chases after them.

There was never enough space for all four ghosts to be represented. Blinky and Clyde's inclusion was decided by Bandai Namco. Why were these larger characters included? 'There's a distinction between having nostalgia for the gameplay and those who are into the iconography of the characters. These characters bring them to life more than just being on the tiles. We got

a good response to the characters, so we knew we had to use them.'

Other features include a moveable joystick (similar to the one included in the Atari set) alongside a coin slot that lights up. The latter feature emerged after the creative lead asked if the two buttons on the arcade could be used. 'There isn't a lot of space,' Sven admits, 'but we tried to figure something out.' It's a charming feature, especially given that PAC-MAN received the Guinness World Records award for Most Successful Coin-Operated Game in 2005.

Removing the back panel of the arcade reveals a mini vignette in which a minifigure is playing the PAC-MAN game on an arcade machine. 'We sometimes just build stuff for fun. Someone from marketing saw it and that was it.'

Once the set's build was locked in, it was passed to the graphic designers who then worked with Bandai Namco to get the set's final look just right.

'It's always a negotiation,' says Sven. 'But for every IP partner it's crucial to have their brand represented in the light that they wish. We wanted to print the PAC-MAN name [on the top of the arcade] as using a sticker would have been difficult to apply – we wanted the logo to be correct.'

Yet, for all the decisions that go into making a LEGO set, be they related to the build, graphics or iconography of the IP depicted, the designer doesn't know where one element of 10323 PAC-MAN Arcade came from – the high score of 16,440, which is used on a multitude of PAC-MAN merchandise but has no apparent origin. 'I've been asked this a lot, and I'm now interested myself... but unfortunately I've not been able to find out. I should have been more curious.'

Fortunately, Sven's focus and interest has been applied where it matters most – on the build of this mechanically innovative and nostalgic set that's bound to keep gamers and builders alike coming back for many years to come. ■

The little arcade vignette is fun.



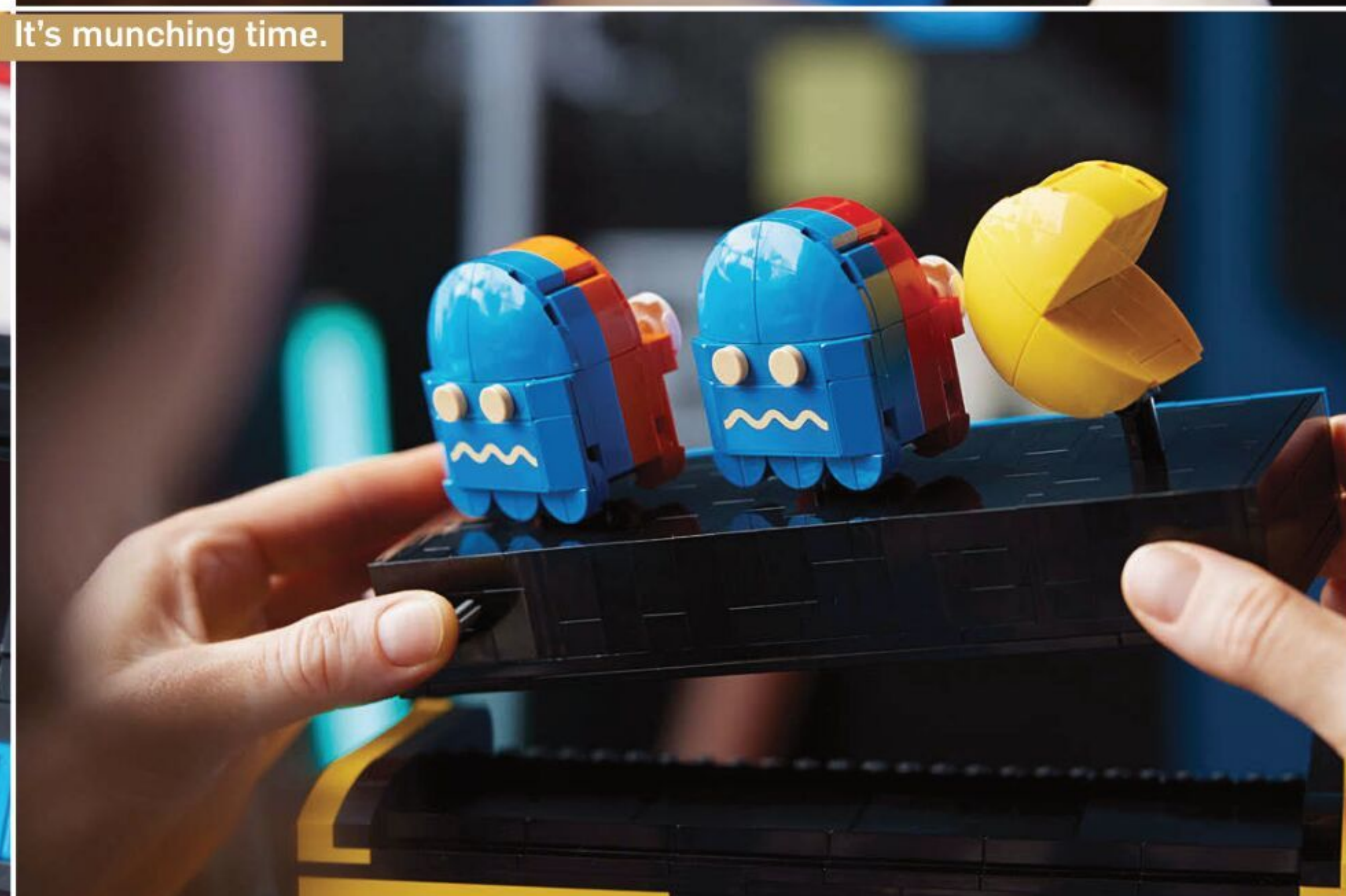
Turn the crank to see PAC-MAN move.



The high score is 16,440.



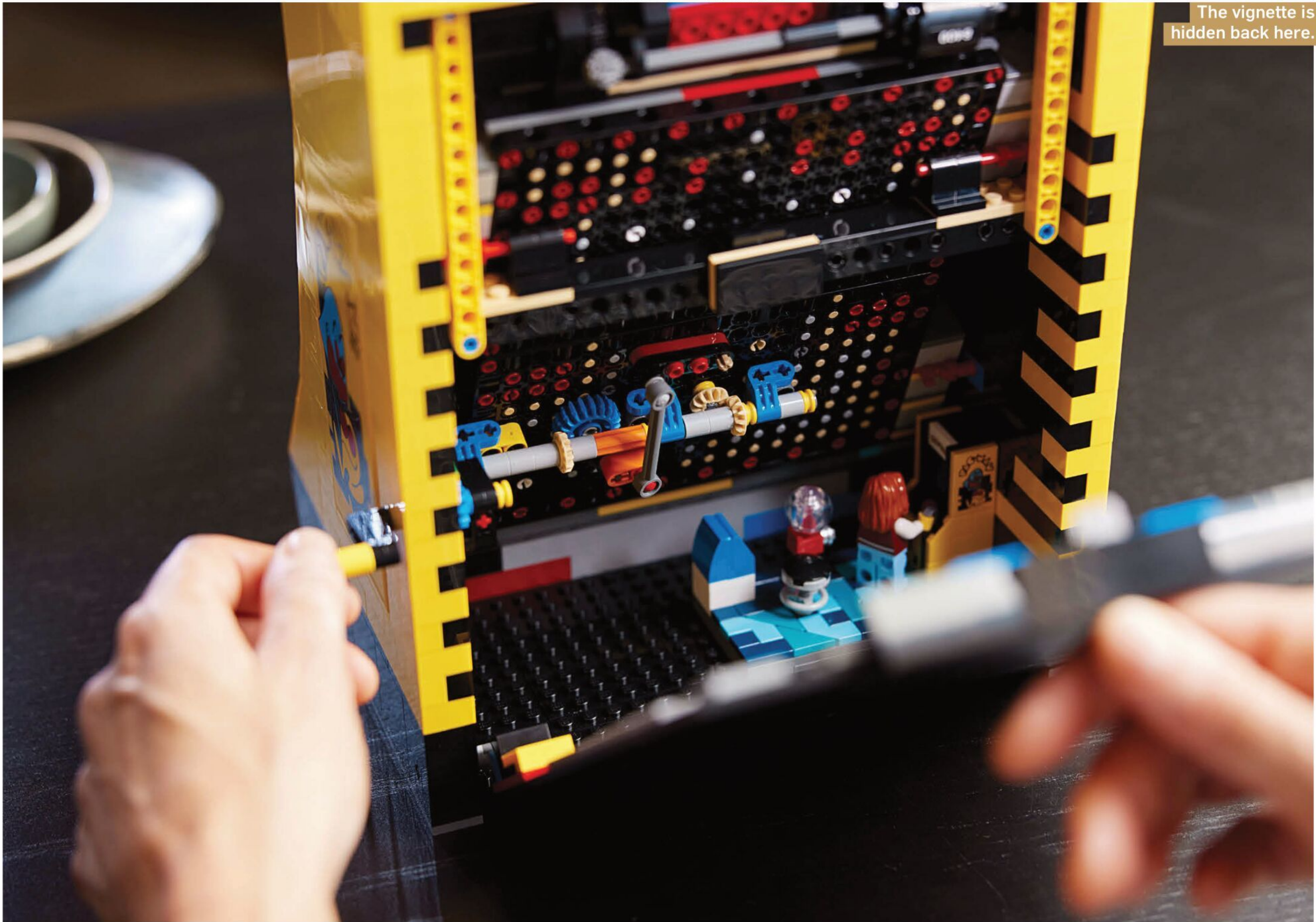
It's munching time.



The model is built in sections.



The vignette is hidden back here.



SHOOTING FOR THE STARS

Talented builder Jan Woźnica and LEGO Ideas Creative Lead Jordan Scott discuss creating miniature tales of galactic proportions

Words: Kat Rees-Jauke **Pics:** The LEGO Group, Daniel Konstanski, Jan Woźnica

FOR GENERATIONS, THE stars have enthralled humanity. Whether as a navigation guide for ancient sailors, as a means of predicting the future through the movements of constellations or a destination to travel to, what lies beyond the Earth has fascinated many different civilisations. As technologies have advanced, the solar system has become less mysterious, as the origins of the

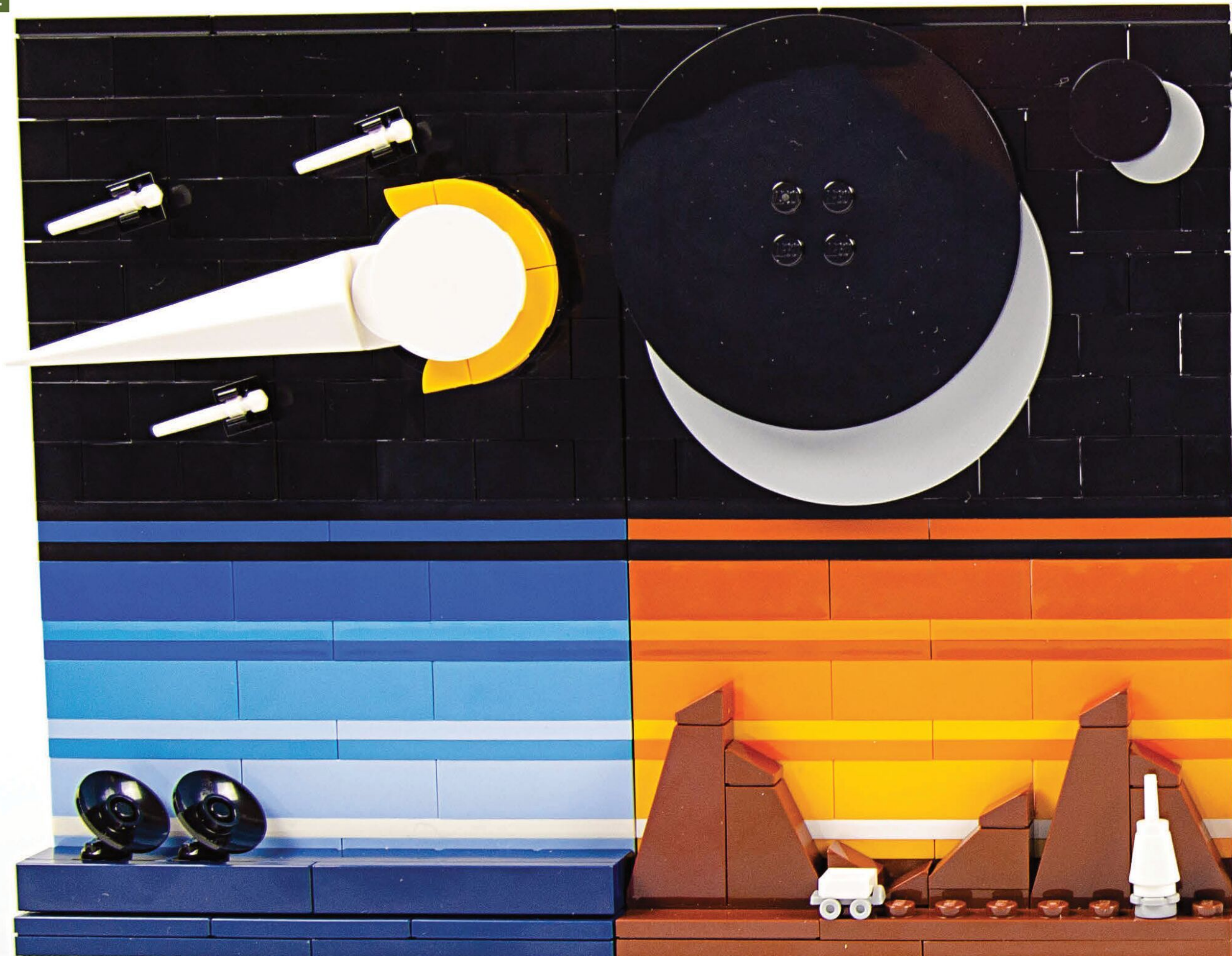
universe and how life came to be have become clearer.

And yet there is still so much that scientists and astrologists simply don't know. With its beguiling mysteries open to interpretation, space has always been a creative playground for the LEGO design team, inspiring everything from futuristic rockets straight out of sci-fi films to

recreations of actual NASA exploration vessels.

'Space intrigues us all and it has been so for millennia,' says Jan Woźnica. He came up with the original concept for 21340 Tales of the Space Age and submitted it to the LEGO Ideas platform. It's a unique collection of four 'postcard' interpretations of the galaxy, combining bold colours with miniature representations of the

Four different
images
connect.



cosmos.

'Everyone is naturally curious about space,' adds LEGO Ideas Creative Lead Jordan Scott, who acted as mission control in making these postcards an official set. 'What is beyond our solar system? It is something that we will spend thousands of years exploring. So, it's just the mystery of the unknown that comes with such a craving to understand.'

This sense of mystery helped Jan to make each postcard different, allowing him to use colours and scale in ways that didn't have to be scientifically accurate. 'It's kind of difficult to point to one inspiration,' explains Jan. 'I really like monochromatic book covers with very simple geometric shapes and I think that's one of my biggest inspirations. But there's been a lot of stuff that has inspired me, including posters created by NASA that have this retro futuristic vibe. Also,

definitely lots of classic science fiction movies.'

It's easy to see the influence of pop culture, with the bold colours reminiscent of classic sci-fi movie posters from the 1980s, like *Tron* and *Star Trek*. 'The colours I took mostly from

THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWN COMES WITH SUCH A CRAVING TO UNDERSTAND

the synthwave vibe, which I really enjoy because it is minimalistic and high contrast,' adds Jan, 'For each subsequent picture I tried to choose different colour palettes.'

Testing the colours and tonal values is one of

the aspects that took the team longest to decide upon, trying to ensure that each postcard had maximum impact when on display. 'Some of the designers who are very into colour theory and science suggested that we make all of the clouds pink,' says Jordan, referencing how something would look when it blasts through the Earth's atmosphere. 'We tried it, but it didn't have the same impact, so we stuck to the original white clouds.'

Colour is perhaps where the finished 21340 model differs most from Jan's submission. Originally, there were only three postcards, but the finished model now has a fourth in bright green. 'We always try and stay true to the original fan design, but we also want to bring a little bit of an extra surprise and value in a set,' explains Jordan, who was eager to further collaborate with Jan to add this fourth postcard.



'It's a black hole being observed by people,' explains Jan, who wanted to incorporate a man-made artefact into each of his designs to capture a sense of storytelling. There's almost a natural progression throughout the models, from early rocket launches to scientists now currently learning about black holes through the Event Horizon Telescope. 'It felt like something we could realistically achieve,' continues Jordan. 'In terms of colours, we looked at the spectrum we already had and green felt like a natural addition.'

It is quite unusual for an Ideas set to stay so true to a fan submission, as usually changes need to be made due to pieces no longer being in production or illegal LEGO techniques having to be redesigned. Jan believes this is mainly because he built from his collection of bricks, which are proudly organised behind him in labelled storage containers. 'When I build my own creations, I always try to make them from physical bricks. Especially in cases like this one where I need to see the colours in real life,' he

says. 'From my point of view, each of the builds starts with a single specialised element and I then tried to limit other specialised elements.'

Jordan is keen to point out how this made it easy to stay faithful to the original design. 'We started by building Jan's submission as closely as

WE WANT TO BRING A LITTLE BIT OF AN EXTRA SURPRISE AND VALUE IN A SET

possible using the bricks we had, so we could get an idea of techniques and where we needed to strengthen things.' One of the only real changes made to the postcards were the hanging brackets on the reverse that allow them to be put up on a wall. 'Jan made his own brackets for the back of each postcard, but we have actual hanging plates now from LEGO Art.'

With each postcard in Tales of the Space Age aiming to tell stories through a minimalistic style, ensuring that the relative simplicity of each model remained interesting to build posed a challenge in itself. 'It's really fun finding those nice elements that work to convey these ideas, so that everyone can immediately understand them,' says Jordan, who knew a balance needed to be struck between the actual build and overall aesthetic.

'It can be challenging, but it's also extremely fun to try and distill something really elaborate, like a sunset, into very simplistic bricks. We had a lot of people walking by the area when we were designing these and they didn't even realise they were made from LEGO bricks. We were just trying to find those little elements that we would typically use for greebling, but that could have multiple uses and representations.'

Compared to other LEGO sets, 21340 Tales of the Space Age relies more heavily on shapes and silhouettes to imply meaning throughout the

The set is intended for decoration.





21340 can be wall mounted.

The four separate sections are built, then connected.



Jan Woźnica's original build.



designs. 'One brick becomes a shuttle or a rover or a star. I find the subtleties of using bricks in this way fascinating,' says Jordan.

While some of these brick uses were planned out by Jan before he even began building, such as the horn element for the comet tail, others were a complete stroke of luck. 'The one I like the most is the crescent moon made from two 8x8 circular plates, which was a complete accident,' laughs Jan. 'The two bricks were just lying on my desk and I saw them and realised they actually made a moon.'

With the sections actually being postcard size, they were relatively easy for the LEGO Ideas team to experiment with, as they could be built quickly to try out different colours or slight changes in composition. However, they weren't always that size. 'I started with something that was half the size of the final postcard,' says the fan designer, who still has the smaller ones displayed on his shelves. 'But then I saw real postcards on the fridge and tried to emulate them, to make my builds similar in size.'

Another challenge posed by the models being so visual was that the LEGO Ideas team couldn't easily sneak in an Easter egg or two. 'On a model like this, it is very difficult to include Easter eggs without them being obvious. However, since Jan is from Poland, we represented the flag in the plates on the back of two of the models,' Jordan says, pointing out the red and white pieces

IT'S EXTREMELY FUN TO DISTILL SOMETHING REALLY ELABORATE INTO VERY SIMPLISTIC BRICKS

cleverly incorporated into the frame.

The design team have added another unique touch to Jan's design – the ability to change the constellations alongside the rocket. While his submission used minifigure wrench pieces

pushed into headlamp bricks, the Ideas team swapped this for newly printed 1x1 tiles.

This resulted in the option to customise the constellation into some of the members of the zodiac, though all twelve aren't possible in the small space. 'We looked into building as many as possible, but some are incredibly complicated,' explains Jordan, lamenting constellations such as Scorpius (Scorpio), which is made up of a whopping 18 different stars. 'We tried to keep it to very iconic constellations that you could easily spot in the night sky, like the Big Dipper and Cassiopeia.'

It's fair to say that 21340 Tales of the Space Age is an icon itself. It manages to seamlessly combine visual storytelling with designs that are eye-catching on display. The model's style is Jan's homage to retro posters and sci-fi art, given a unique twist through the ingenious use of some unlikely LEGO pieces. As looking up at the stars and dreaming is such a universal feeling, Jan hopes that other LEGO fans will be tempted to extend the set with their own designs. ■

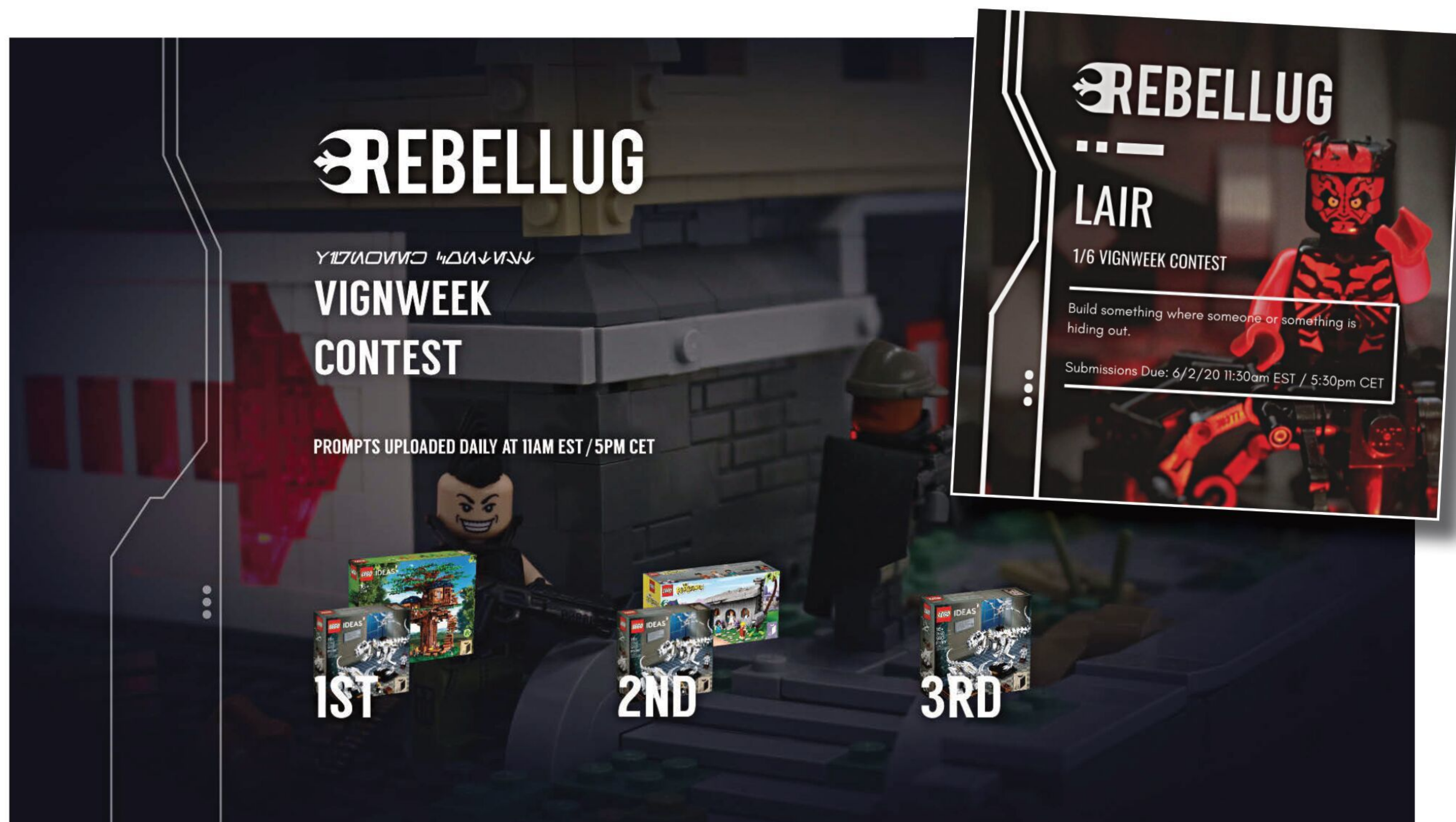
The four 'postcards' can be separated.



VIGNWEEK

Construct a new vignette build a day for a whole week? It sounds tough, but it's even tougher when you don't know the topic in advance

Words: Geneva Durand **Pics:** Vignweek entrants



ONE WEEK A year is vignette week—a week of intense competition, amazing one-day builds, and, for participants, very little sleep. Each day at a fixed time the contest organisers share the day's prompt—something like 'Cave Mining' or 'Post Apocalypse' or 'Not Minifigure Scale'. For the rest of the day, builders will eat, drink and breathe that prompt as they race to complete a fitting LEGO creation.

With upwards of 50 entries each day, the challenge is real. Standing out from the crowd takes a clever interpretation of the prompt, mad building skills and top quality presentation. Year after year, builders deliver just that, with the top

scoring builders often separated only by a few points.

For the purposes of Vignweek, a vignette is defined as a LEGO build between 32x32 and 16x16 studs big. It's not a huge footprint, but neither is it small. Your ceiling is the limit when it comes to height, though time is likely to be more of a factor than anything else. Other than those technical specs, a vignette is just a slice of life that, as it were, creates a hole in a blank canvas for you to see through to a bit of the bustling world behind. Traditionally, a LEGO vignette includes a border or at least is fully framed within the picture, but occasionally

you'll see edge-to-edge LEGO scenes counted as vignettes too, since they can fit Vignweek's technical specs.

Building for Vignweek is a unique experience; with only 24 hours to build in, there's little time to second guess your decisions or stick to a detailed plan. Each prompt is a new adventure and a new surprise as builders just sit down and click bricks together without looking back. Despite the gruelling schedule, Vignweek is a competition second to none when it comes to inspiring high-quality LEGO creations, and for variety of themes and styles, it can't be beat!

GET INVOLVED

Vignweek is hosted by RebelLUG:
Instagram: [@rebellug](https://www.instagram.com/rebellug) / Web: rebellug.com

Vignweek runs annually for just one week, usually in summer. This year, it's slated to run sometime in August. The contest is hosted on RebelLUG's Discord server, accessible via their Instagram or website.

Vignweek started strong in 2019, with 45 entries on the very first day. The unique format and exhilarating pace of the competition have continued to attract builders each year. For the most part, the format has stayed the same; 24 hours to build for a short prompt for five days, and then 48 hours for the last 'day'.

The pace and size of the competition makes it gruelling not just for participants, but for organisers too, as each build needs to be scored the day after it is submitted. Organisers aim to have a list of the top 10 entries from each day ready only a day after the submission period ends. This keeps it exciting for participants, as they can see how well they're doing with only a day's time lag.

Unlike most LEGO competitions, where winning or placing in a category means you win a prize, Vignweek's winners are determined based on their cumulative performance throughout the week. This puts a premium on daily participation, in keeping with the intensive nature of the competition. Winning Vignweek isn't just a matter of building one build for one day; you've got to keep up the pace for six days running.

At least two different methods have been used to determine winners. Most recently, the judges have scored each entry on the basis of build quality, prompt interpretation and presentation on a scale of up to 100 points. Each builder's top five scores of the week are then added, and the builder with the highest total is the winner. Totalling the top five scores instead of all six makes things a little easier on builders who might unavoidably have to skip a day.

Vignweek has visited lots of fun places with its prompts. Some years, each prompt has followed a pattern; in 2021 for example, the prompts were Ancient, Historical, Fantastical, Modern Era, Futuristic and Mixed Themes. Others prompts have focused more on build restrictions, such as the Classic Colours prompt that challenged builders to only use the seven earliest LEGO colors, or Not Minifigure Scale where, as the name implies, builders had to create a vignette that was either smaller or larger than minifigure scale.

Some prompts have proved successful enough to have an encore. Star Wars + Theme, a mashup of any official LEGO theme with Star Wars, ran both in 2020 and 2022. But no matter the prompt, Vignweek never fails to bring out the best in builders in an unbelievably short space of time.

Build: The Keep
Builder: Joel Tyer
Instagram: joko_of_nerogue
Category: Historical
Year: 2021



Build: Underwater Cave
Builder: Luka
Instagram: firstorderlego
Category: Cave Mining
Year: 2019



Build: Agent CP-230
Builder: Jaap Bijl
Instagram: jaapbijl_
Category: Cyberpunk
Year: 2019



Build: Aragog's Burrow
Builder: Caleb Schilling
Instagram: cheeseystudios
Category: Lair
Year: 2020



Build: Kai Fighter
Builder: Simon Liu
Instagram: si_mocs
Category: Mixed Themes
Year: 2021



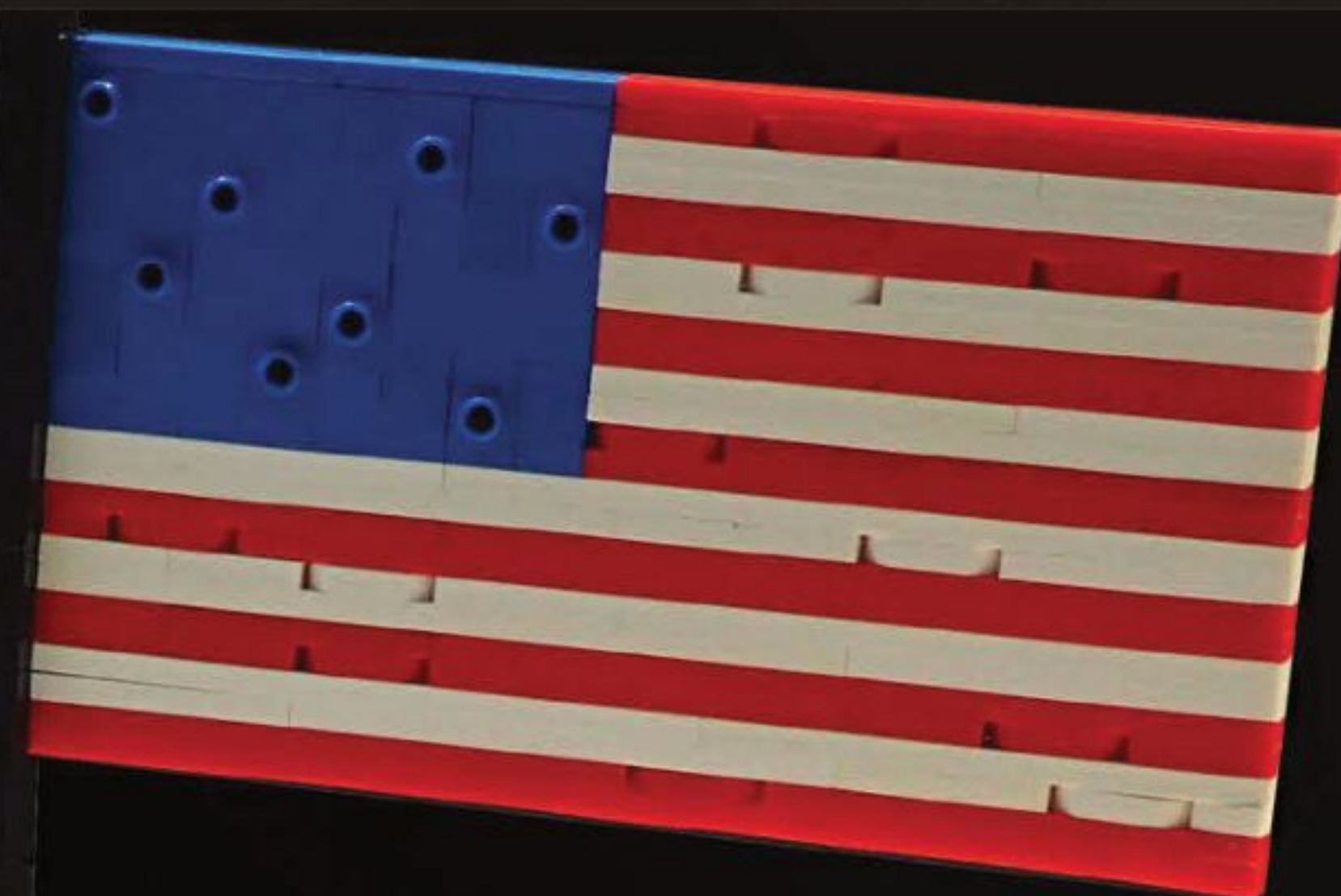


Build: Strategy
Builder: Eli Willsea
Instagram: forlornempire
Category: Ancient
Year: 2021

Build: Biolab
Builder: Jake Hansen
Instagram: mountainhobbit
Category: Futuristic
Year: 2021



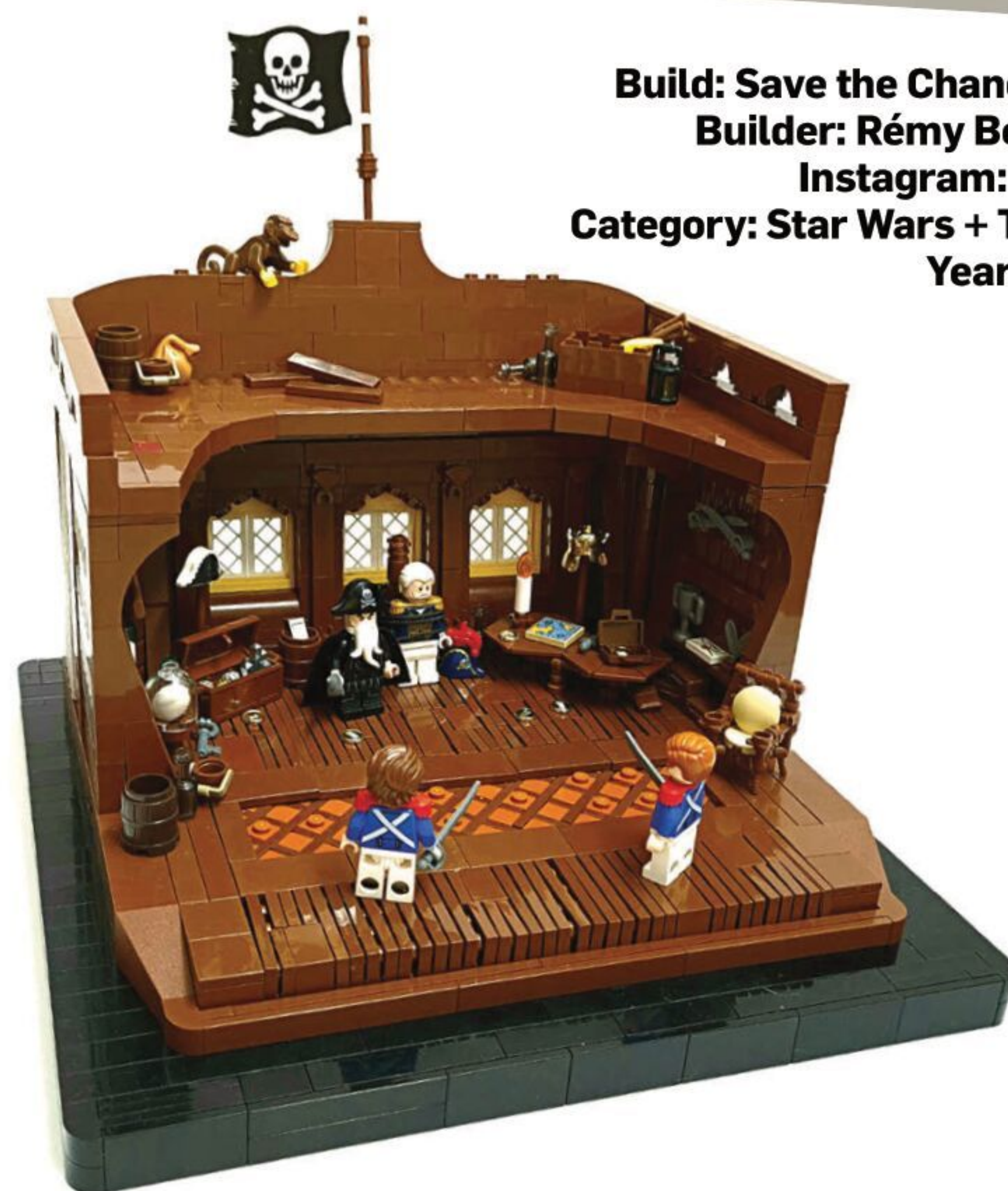
Build: One small brick for man...
Builder: Isaiah Durand
Instagram: isaiahdurand_earl
Category: Classic Colours
Year: 2022



Build: Forestmen's Crossing Revamp
Builder: Marc M.
Instagram: mbricks52
Category: Classic Set Revamp
Year: 2022



Build: Save the Chancellor!
Builder: Rémy Berthon
Instagram: rilbist
Category: Star Wars + Theme
Year: 2022



PIRATE HIDEOUT

Eli Willsea used a very clever technique at the centre of his buccaneering build

Words: Geneva Durand **Pics:** Eli Willsea

THE KEY TO a good vignette is an interesting layout and this Pirate Hideout is perfect, with multiple levels and no one element getting in another section's way. Eli Willsea built the hideout for the 'Historical' topic during Vignweek 2021.

Blocks: How big is the Pirate Hideout? How hard was it to build in only one day?

Eli: This model fits within a 32x32 baseplate as that was a restriction in the contest. I think the central mast was maybe one foot tall. It was quite challenging to complete this in one day, not just because I wanted to come up with a good concept and layout but I also wanted it to be polished and interesting. Not only do you have to worry about the build, but also the photography and editing, which can take even more time.

What was the building process like? Did you plan it before you started or did it just come together?

I have been a fan of tropical pirate themes for a long time so a lot of the inspiration came from a mix of things that were already swirling in my mind, including Assassins Creed Black Flag, Pirates of the Caribbean

and just looking up pretty tropical places around the world.

After I had decided to go with pirates, the building process began with scribbling out a potential layout. I started building the main platform hideout, then made the sand and water around the base and finished it off by adding the details, trees, and minifigures.

When building a lot of my creations, especially in fast paced contests like Vignweek, I usually only have a rough idea of the layout and the majority of the build just comes together as I go and push towards the vision in my mind.

What was the biggest challenge you faced with this build?

The biggest challenge was definitely the platform itself. It is a little hard to tell in the final photo but the entire deck is made of plates, all only half pressed together, to create a thin plank texture. This created all sorts of ratio problems when trying to connect it, so ultimately it is actually sitting loose on top the support piers, except for the central mast where I created a hole for it to pass through.

What's your favourite thing about this build?

Besides the general cheery tropical atmosphere of the build, my favourite detail would have to be the subtle curve in the dock on the left. I'd love to expand on this technique in a future build with wooden plankways that bend and turn in fun ways.



SPACEWALK AT OUTPOST 31

Caleb Schilling had to go tall when he constructed a futuristic outpost

Words: Geneva Durand **Pics:** Caleb Schilling

THE SHEER SIZE of Caleb Schilling's colourful outer space vignette makes it almost incredible that he built it in one day... yet he did just that. Spacewalk at Outpost 31 was built on the fifth day of Vignweek in 2020 for the 'Space' prompt.

Blocks: How big is Spacewalk? How hard was it to build in only one day?

Caleb: Vignweek enforces a strict 32x32 stud boundary for the length and width of your MOC, but there are no such rules when it comes to height. The model fit easily within the baseplate restriction, but probably took up around three feet of vertical space when placed on its display stand. This was the most ambitious Vignweek build I've undertaken. I had always wanted to build something like this and the 'Space' prompt finally gave me an excuse to do so. Having an idea right from the start helped ensure I finished on time.

What was the building process like? Did you plan it before you started or did it just come together?

Inspiration for this one came from a number of places. I love a good gritty sci-fi movie and I wanted to channel some of that aesthetic here. Blade Runner definitely comes to mind. I also felt inspired by the NINJAGO City sets, taking that concept and putting it into space.

When it came time to build, I created each coloured module separately and then connected them all together at the end, filling in the gaps with various greebles and other details. I wanted it to look as if a bunch of sections had been

fused together over decades, being built on top of each other as time went on. There's a bit of randomness and unintentionality that came from building everything individually like that.

What was the biggest challenge you faced for this build?

A build like this provided a lot of freedom for me. I was able to combine different styles and colours, so I never really got bored of building. I think the real challenge came when after nearly 14 hours of solid building, I had to get the thing photographed and edited yet too. Presentation is a huge part of Vignweek, and just LEGO building in general, and it takes a lot of time — especially

with a model as weirdly shaped as this.

What's your favourite thing about this build?

Before you start building, I feel you always have a picture in your mind as to what it's going to turn out like. The way the modules came together in the end though exceeded my initial expectations, and I'm really happy with the final composition of the whole thing. There's something special about building for height too. We've all seen expansive train layouts or broad battle scenes, but going vertical in LEGO just works for me. ■



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LEGO 2K DRIVE

Does this fresh take on a LEGO game stall at the starting line or race past the chequered flag?

Words & Pics: Kat Rees-Jauke

VERDICT

A complete change of pace for LEGO video games that combines chaotic fun with imaginative customisation, but the microtransactions are frustrating.

70/100

FOR YEARS, LEGO video games have offered a reassuring sense of nostalgia, following a familiar format that has become an enjoyable staple for fans. It has almost always been about running around as a minifigure, smashing bricks, usually following a movie's storyline.

Despite how beloved TT Games' titles are, a fair chunk of the fanbase has been wondering how the LEGO gaming experience could be freshened up. When LEGO 2K Drive was announced, it is fair to say that almost everyone was excited by the prospect. A kart racer with almost unlimited vehicle customisation options? It sounds like the perfect blend of gaming and building for a fresh LEGO video game experience.

2K Drive may have a clunky name, but it runs as smoothly as a Ferrari. Having been in production for several years, it is clear to see the sheer time and effort that has gone into the gameplay. High octane from the get-go, opening up a new game takes you straight into the world

of Bricklandia – think The LEGO Movie meets Disney Pixar's Cars.

Stunning graphics combine a world mainly made from LEGO bricks, from the trees to the cities, with the landscapes being traditionally rendered, although with some fun blocky touches dotted around. There are several

LEGO 2K DRIVE'S DYNAMICS AND CONTROLS WILL FEEL FAMILIAR

locations to play through, so 2K Drive has plenty of world exploring potential and these offer a wacky mix of themes. Big Butte County feels like a modern take on the LEGO Western theme, complete with prospectors. The main rival to beat is a car-driving horse (yes, there are horsepower jokes). It's Halloween every

day in Hauntsborough, which is basically The Nightmare Before Christmas but with a bunch of monster trucks.

For those who have played racing games before, the dynamics and controls of LEGO 2K Drive will feel familiar. They are smooth and easy to learn, with a wonderful handbrake-turn combo that makes hairpin bends a breeze. Each one is explained by Clutch Racington, your self-proclaimed charismatic mentor, who acts as a guide throughout the game. There's plenty of classic LEGO humour from each of the characters and commentators, including main villain Shadow Z, who hates you just for existing.

During races the controls are responsive and the fast pace is thrilling, though this can be influenced somewhat by your vehicle of choice.

One thing that seems to be off is the timing during races. Even after gaining a considerable lap lead via boosting and power-ups, your AI opponents will suddenly come out of nowhere, somehow having caught up in less than a lap. A



quick look at the finishing leaderboard will also show milliseconds between each racer, when there likely should be a bigger time gap. That makes winning races feel more like random luck than actual skill.

Another complaint is that the controls at slower speeds lack some finesse. Basically there's full throttle and park, with no cruising speed in between. Why does this matter in a game about racing? Because there's also a huge open world area to explore and it would be

nicer to not crash into everything. And expect to crash.

In fact, this game encourages chaotic destruction. There are actually trophies for crashing into traffic, nudging aside pedestrians and basically being a road hog. With everything being LEGO bricks, it just clicks itself back together anyway, so there's no issue with being a destructive driver. It's sure to be an element that fans of all ages will enjoy, laughing at the havoc that can be wreaked on these virtual roads.

Once each of the four locations has been unlocked in story mode, which is about halfway through the game, then the sheer expansiveness of Bricklandia comes to life. It's reminiscent of The LEGO Movie 2 Videogame, as each location is packed full of hidden items and side quests to complete. The side quests can change with each visit to a location – new ones appear after gaining a certain amount of XP or a specific item to help complete a mission. These can be done anytime during story mode or returned to once

When not racing, Clutch is walking Mr Fiddles.



Octan references are found throughout Bricklandia.



you've finished the game. Some feel just like a normal karting quest, with speed or accuracy the key objective, but others have more of a LEGO twist, such as smashing as many brick-built objects in a given time period.

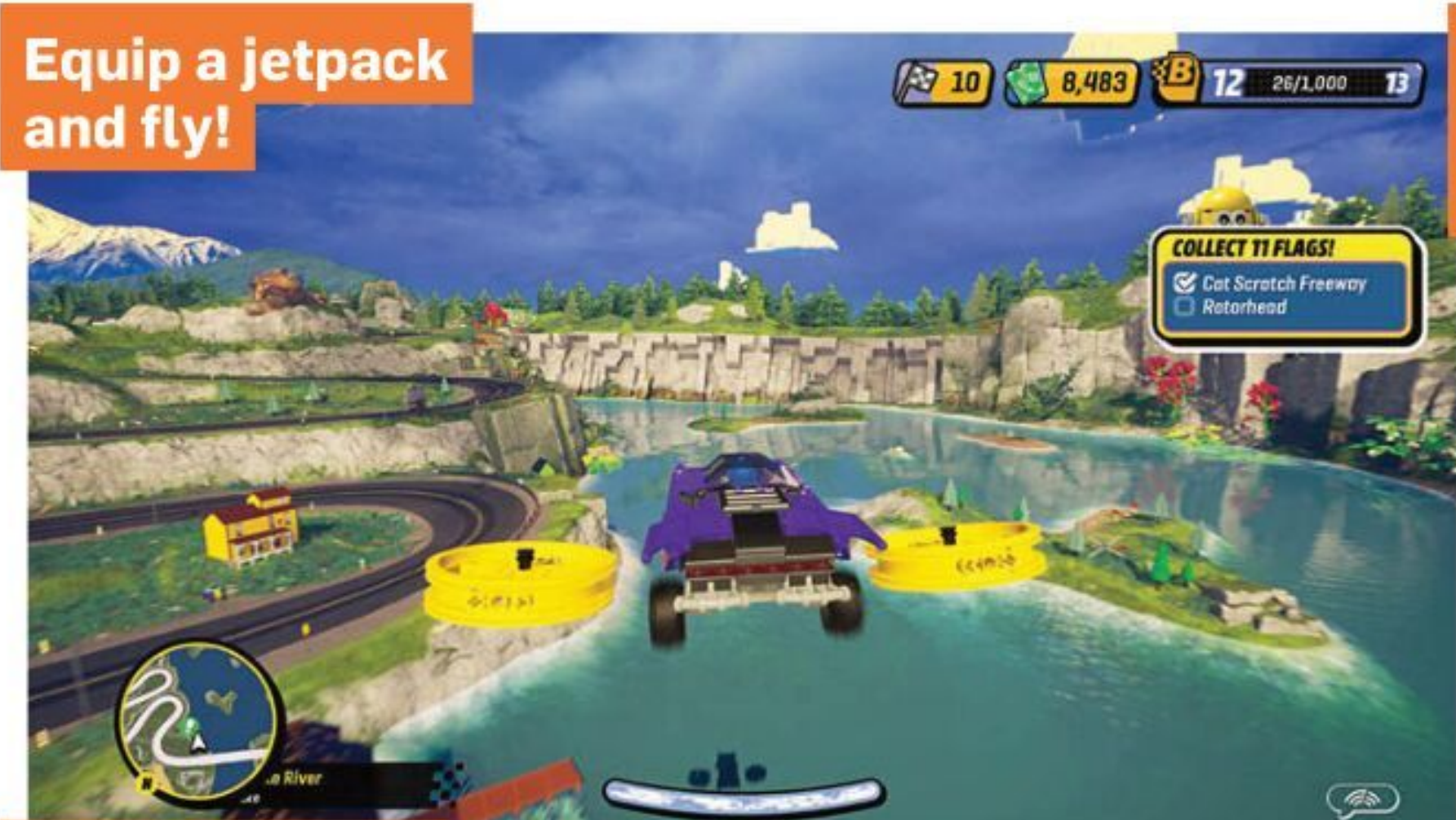
In typical karting format, 2K Drive features power-ups and items to dodge throughout each race. There are a several different power-ups, with the spider web option being one of the most useful, slowing a racer down by blocking their windscreen. While it may be a way to gain an

advantage at a pivotal moment, unfortunately there currently isn't a way to turn this off for those with arachnophobia. Even a LEGO spider is pretty realistic, especially in the heat of the racing moment.

Taking a leaf out of Mario Kart, the racing tracks also contain some special power-ups, including acceleration lanes for extra big jumps or bonuses for hovering in the air. Watch out for killer sharks in the water too – because these races cover all terrain types.

Just like in Sonic & SEGA All-Stars Racing or The Crew 2, this game features an automatic vehicle swapping system that changes your ride depending on the terrain, complete with brick-clicking sound effects. There are three transformations for street rides, off-roaders and boats for when you hit the water (where the sharks can be waiting). It can take some getting used to the rapid swapping, especially if you've not played a game like this before, but a menu option can switch it to manual control if it's

Equip a jetpack and fly!



This guy's name really is Max Speed.



Driving a skull cranium is totally normal in 2K Drive.



Area Fifty-Fun is one of many puns.



Bring on the confetti.



proving too much of an annoyance.

Each type of vehicle has customisation options, including adding digital stickers or changing up the paint job. Imagination is the only boundary because with a nearly unlimited roster of LEGO elements in every colour, you can create literally anything. Spending hours in the garage customising or building is probably how many players will dedicate their gaming time.

Driving around to explore the open worlds allows you to really appreciate the design of these locations, with the LEGO animation fluidly blending alongside traditional graphics. LEGO fans will easily recognise references to Octan and Collectible Minifigures characters, though you certainly don't need to be a brick aficionado to enjoy 2K Drive. In fact the actual driving aspect is basically a re-skin of most popular karting video games, with the controls relatively similar. There's less accuracy paid to each vehicle's centre of gravity though, which makes 2K Drive easier than others – and if you crash then your vehicle will simply snap its pieces back together.

Another way the controls vary is that drifting – which allows a player to take sharper turns – is done by pressing both the brake and accelerator. Most karting video games will solely focus on momentum and braking, so controlling a drift at speed in 2K Drive can take some getting used to.

While there are a lot of similarities with other kart racers, what really makes this a LEGO video game are the vehicle designs. Want to drive a skeleton monster truck or a boat that's got an alligator prow? Not a problem. You can even build a burger to drive around. These vehicles don't need to follow road laws and they embrace that in weird and wonderfully wacky ways.

2K has also announced that a sharing option

for custom creations is on the way, although this was not available in the launch game.

What is surprising is that you can't customise your driver. While the focus of this game might be on cars, your racer is still your avatar who takes to the podium after every race. Even in the Awesome Edition, the starting avatars are limited to about 10 options, with a definite over-representation of men.

It's in areas like choosing drivers that the game gets frustrating. One of its key aspects is accessibility. This is a game designed to be playable by fans of any age. It achieves that for the actual gameplay, but its microtransactions

EACH LOCATION IS PACKED FULL OF HIDDEN ITEMS AND SIDE QUESTS TO COMPLETE

are going to be divisive. Different players will be able to invest different amounts of money into LEGO 2K Drive. Buying extra bricks to use for customisation is completely possible through the brick-bux (that's the in-game currency) earned during the story mode.

The same cannot be said for the rest. Want a new avatar or a fancy vehicle? Well, then you're basically forced into a microtransaction. Earning brick-bux through gameplay is tortuously slow. Even after around six hours, you won't have anywhere near enough to buy a new avatar in-game, which start at around 10,000 brick-bux, while some time-limited specials are around double or triple that.

Microtransactions are not a new element

for video games. They are present in some huge titles, such as The Witcher and Star Wars: Battlefront II, but in a game that is intended for all ages, it is going to alienate younger players. Parents are either going to have to manage the hassle of being pestered for a character or vehicle that's at least £4.49 (\$5.99) per purchase or have to put spending limits onto their respective console accounts. While there is plenty to do in the main game, these tempting purchases are hard to resist, especially considering the uninspired roster of avatars. And that's not all because a Season Pass, which gives access to another 100 playable races, costs another £8.99 (\$9.99). This all starts to add up on top of the not insignificant initial purchase.

This does not make LEGO 2K Drive a bad video game, but at the same time it doesn't feel that different from other kart racers. Just like those other karting games it can get expensive quickly and the time-limited items only induce dreaded FOMO, which is hardly in line with the LEGO Group's traditional approach. For a title that has customisation as one of its key aspects, it doesn't make sense that so much of this is behind a paywall. Previous LEGO video games have only ever made use of DLC packs, which are infrequent and spaced out, so it's quite a change in style.

Looking past the microtransactions, 2K Drive is still a fun game. Each race is wonderfully chaotic, the zany cast of characters are full of heart and the classic LEGO inspired humour is delivered during every level. This is a fresh take on a LEGO video game, even if it relies on classic karting mechanics, and with a world that feels cinematic in scale, there are hours of gameplay to enjoy. ■

Watch out for killer sharks.



Price: £19.99, \$24.99, €24.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 261

76914 FERRARI 812 COMPETIZIONE

Has the latest LEGO Ferrari been overtaken by the competition?

Words: David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

THE LEGO GROUP has a long-standing relationship with the prancing horse, so 812 Competizione is an unsurprising addition. While the long-nosed Berlinetta body shape has been created reasonably well, the challenges of creating such a distinctive silhouette start to show when viewed closely.

The sides are particularly smart, built from overlapping tiles, plates and wedges to form the air-intakes and side vents. The front nose, with its exposed carbon fibre insert and stickered diffuser, is also well realised. The black band across the bonnet, created from triangular

tiles, also works well. Unfortunately, the colour matching on the printed windscreen element detracts from the visual appeal.

The rear of the Ferrari uses a couple of stud shooters to very clever effect as exhausts and the techniques used to mount the rear of the car at an angle feel quite interesting and more in-keeping with what's expected from this theme.

Unlike most cars, the 812 doesn't have a rear window.

However, items such as the small, difficult-to-apply stickers and the gapping between those stickers as they attempt to form a solid yellow stripe across the entire car, detract from the overall look.

This isn't a bad set in any sense, with moments of joy in the build process, but it's the weakest of the wave by some margin. ■



THE CHALLENGES OF CREATING SUCH A DISTINCTIVE SILHOUETTE START TO SHOW

Price: £19.99, \$24.99, €24.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 249

76915 PAGANI UTOPIA

The Italian hypercar manufacturer joins the Speed Champions garage

Words: David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

A NEW MANUFACTURER joins the Speed Champions garage as the Pagani Utopia hypercar makes its debut appearance. Pagani has always produced unique looking and instantly striking cars and the Italian manufacturer's signature style and design have not been lost in LEGO form.

The build makes good use of new elements including the updated chassis and wheel arch pieces as well as wedge slopes, open stud plates and numerous printed elements. Clever clip techniques attach the superb front grille – this is a complex, upside-down-built sub-assembly cleverly incorporates ice skate accessories in order to replicate the Utopia's front view.

The rear of the car is even more impressive. The distinctive four-barrelled exhaust is expertly replicated – clips and bars provide a way to achieve the ideal angle of the rear section with wedge slopes filling the bodywork gaps perfectly. The exhaust itself is formed from a

printed circular tile and four traditional door elements around it that create the distinctive shape. A new printed cockpit element also impresses, revealing the nicely detailed and stylish interior.

The Utopia would appear to be a difficult shape to create using LEGO elements, but the design expertise of the Speed Champions team makes this a superb debut for Pagani. ■

THE DISTINCTIVE FOUR-BARRELLED EXHAUST IS EXPERTLY REPLICATED

The LEGO version is significantly cheaper and more attainable than the real thing.



VERDICT

An underwhelming build for a Speed Champions set with an annoying reliance on small stickers.

60/100

VERDICT

What can you ask for beyond great techniques, new elements, clever part usage and a gorgeous finished car?

87/100

Price: £19.99, \$24.99, €24.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 280

76916 PORSCHE 963

Does one of the most challenging vehicle classes to replicate impress?

Words: David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

ENDURANCE RACING CARS have had a mixed history in the Speed Champions series. The highly specialised and sweeping aerodynamics are often challenging to replicate in the relatively clumsy medium of LEGO elements. The new 76916 Porsche 963 set manages to resolve many of these historic problems, albeit through the use of some new parts and an eye-watering number of stickers.

The overall look is surprisingly effective; from the side view, the LEGO version is a great replica of the source material. A new windscreen element makes some of this possible – sleeker and narrower than previous elements, the windscreen leads into a long tail fin element, normally only seen in Star Wars sets, that

creates the streamlined effect.

The build is relatively straightforward for Speed Champions, using a traditional chassis element and lots of plate stacking in the initial stages. The rear wing diffuser and complex light cluster are a particular highlight. The front spoiler and headlights are also brilliantly achieved using a transparent half circle tile to

achieve the effect.

It's unfortunate that much of the look is reliant on stickers, but the slim chances of being able to reuse such highly specific printed elements makes it an understandable trade-off. Given the limitations of the medium, the set does a remarkable job of conveying the overall look of the 963. ■

VERDICT

Not a set for sticker-phobes, but the overall look is an impressive rendition of the real thing.

74/100

Twin turbo V8 and an 800v electric system.



THE BUILD IS RELATIVELY STRAIGHTFORWARD

Price: £19.99, \$24.99, €24.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 319

76917 2 FAST 2 FURIOUS NISSAN SKYLINE GT-R (R34)

The Fast & Furious series inspires another Speed Champions set

Words: David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

AT THE TIME of writing, there are pretty much as many Fast & Furious movies as this set has parts. The long-running franchise has featured some amazing vehicles but it's the 1999 Nissan Skyline GT-R34, driven by the late Paul Walker, that's celebrated here.

In familiar Speed Champions fashion, the build uses some professional LEGO techniques to achieve the distinctive visuals of the car. The front bonnet and grille is probably the clearest example of this. It seems implausible to us mere mortals that the best way to build the front of the Skyline is by the use of plates, panels, clips, minifigure guns, jumper plates, reverse-mounted stickered panels and enough stud-offsets to make your brain hurt trying to calculate them.

The end result is, of course, highly impressive and rewarding to build. Less successful, but unfortunately unavoidable, are the exposed

studs above each wheel arch. The boxy shape of the car is accurate, if a little bland, and the application of stickers across the rear becomes a little tiresome.

The Brian O'Conner minifigure is reasonable,

but it's slightly disappointing that he lacks printed legs or a dual-printed face. The detailed interior of the car and the overall look compensate for these minor annoyances and fans of the franchise will not be disappointed. ■

VERDICT

A fun build that does justice to both the real-life and movie vehicle.

79/100

The unmistakable shape of Godzilla.



Price: £39.99, \$34.99, €44.99 / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 581

76918 MCLAREN SOLUS GT & MCLAREN F1 LM

A supercar from the 1990s and one from a video game can't be any good, can they?

Words: David Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

VERDICT

Sensational builds that create two terrific models; yet again, the Speed Champions theme raises the bar.

90/100

TWIN PACK SPEED Champion sets have been a mixed bag – often one car is the stand-out attention grabber and the other can feel like a poor relation. This latest McLaren set blows that idea completely out of the water with two exceptional builds that result in stunning looking vehicles.

The McLaren F1 LM is the more conventional-looking car of the two, even if the car itself is anything but. Built to commemorate their Le Mans victories, the F1 is considered one of the most important supercars ever built with performance statistics that still hold up today.

The build uses the newer six stud wide chassis element as its base and from this humble beginning things start to become very interesting. Vertically mounted tow ball joints, SNOT bricks connected in multiple directions, stud-offsets, stud-reversal and anti-studs used in weird and wonderful ways all work together brilliantly.

The rear section of the car and light cluster is an especially pleasing assembly, just one of many ingenious moments throughout the build.

The interior somehow manages to replicate the real-world vehicle too, with its central driving position and two small rear seats. Admittedly these are a little too narrow for a full size minifigure, but it's a compromise that is easy to accept.

The perfectly angled nose section is another highly rewarding section to see coming together,

FROM THIS HUMBLE BEGINNING THINGS START TO BECOME VERY INTERESTING

using multiple build directions and super-clever attachment techniques. A couple of Technic pins, tiles and a paddle accessory create the effect of the contoured side panels that brings the finished car to life – it's stunning from every angle and a terrific representation of the real thing.

By comparison, the build of the Solus

feels more like solving a puzzle. You start with a lengthways mounted axle and lots of conventional Technic parts connected in seemingly unconventional ways. Rounded jumper plates and other 'exotic' parts are added at strange locations with plenty of bars and clips used to attach flared wings and bodywork at complex angles.

It's not until the midpoint of the build that anything resembling a car starts to take shape – and what a shape this is. The nine-stud wide chassis hosts a large propeller blade that is ingeniously mounted at the rear to form a fin and the hinged front nose is flanked by large, white curved wheel arches. Claws, clips, bars, wedge plates and tiles are added in complex ways to create the distinctive bodywork, yet the overall car is much more sturdy than it looks.

A game controller steering wheel is the final, fitting, touch to this unusual and very special car. The Solus may not be quite as iconic as the F1, but neither can be considered a weak link in this impressive twin pack. ■

Side-by-side the Solus is slightly larger, but has fewer seats.



Price: £39.99, \$39.99, €39.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 549

40623 BATTLE OF ENDOR HEROES

It's time to bang on helmets as if they're drums and party with the Ewoks

Words & Pics: Kat Rees-Jauke

VERDICT

Five pretty close to perfect BrickHeadz builds in one box, but perhaps Han got lost in the forest.

65/100

No Bothans were harmed in the making of this set.



That printed moustache is everything.



WITH THE SECOND Death Star looming on the horizon and the Rebels planning to make a desperate last stand, it's a time for heroes to rise. And on the Forest Moon of Endor, some furry little Ewoks come to the aid of Luke Skywalker and his friends. 40623 Battle of Endor Heroes is certainly not a trap and deserves a hero's welcome into any Star Wars collection.

Having a set of BrickHeadz in one box is always a challenge because there is a risk of the builds feeling repetitive. It's a relief that 40623 avoids that pitfall. Each BrickHeadz is a fascinating build, with the characters split in a way that keeps things interesting.

Things start with Luke – he's the simplest and most recognisable figure. Curved tiles

recreate his belt buckle, black plates suggest his mechanical hand and his hair uses a good mix of dark tan plates for texture.

Leia is a much more detailed figure who uses a mix of 1x1 bricks to imitate the camouflage pattern of her poncho. There are some great SNOT techniques for her Rebel headgear and her belt uses a newly printed 1x3 tile. The many new printed elements are most prominent on R2-D2, who somehow works in this format even though he's a round droid. Han Solo would probably have been more appropriate, but parts collectors will certainly appreciate the polished silver elements.

Looking dapper as always, Lando has swagger even at this scale. His figure is built in all directions to capture the different angles of

his cape and uniform, with some nice variation of blues that are pretty screen accurate. What's most impressive though is Lando's hair, which uses a myriad of cheese slopes and bread loaf tiles to imitate its curly appearance.

Wicket rounds out the set. Although the little Ewok has an adorable, printed belly and looks pretty good, he really needed a nose. One tile for his nose like on a BrickHeadz Pets model would have completed the character better.

As a celebration for Return of the Jedi, 40623 Battle of Endor Heroes is exactly that. It delivers characters fans love in a set that won't carbon freeze a budget. For collectors looking to have a smaller memento of this 40th anniversary, then this set is a great option. ■

40623 BATTLE OF ENDOR HEROES IS CERTAINLY NOT A TRAP

Note Luke's accurate belt buckle.



Do you want a cookie?



Price: £89.99, \$99.99, €99.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 807

75352 EMPEROR'S THRONE ROOM DIORAMA

The galaxy's evil dictator can hurl lightning – and insults – at Luke Skywalker from his new seat of power

Words: Graham E. Hancock **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

RETURN OF THE Jedi, the entry in the Star Wars saga celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, is absolutely packed with memorable moments. It's fair to say though that one sequence stands out above any other in the movie; the confrontation between Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader and the Emperor.

That makes it the perfect choice for a LEGO Star Wars diorama. This model depicts the Emperor's throne, so memorable because of that huge window that frames it. The character displays his power by sitting at the centre of a vast, empty room and the set captures that beautifully.

Getting things started isn't the most enthralling build, as you're constructing the base and building areas at different levels. It does come across as very clever when you then cover it with tiles and it becomes apparent why each area is at a different height.

THE CHARACTER DISPLAYS HIS POWER BY SITTING AT THE CENTRE OF A VAST, EMPTY ROOM

The Emperor watches father and son duel.



VERDICT

A beautiful depiction of one of the Star Wars saga's defining sequences.

73/100

The large window element had to be a bespoke printed piece and is very accurate to the source material. To frame it, you must build the same section over and over, which you then attach to flexible components. The repetition is a little frustrating, but the finished effect looks excellent.

The set's back section is covered by a curved arch and although there is a little bit of repetition, it is very quick to construct and looks very polished when complete. By having it set forward from the window, the relatively shallow diorama is given a lot of depth by it.

To convey the movie location within the template of the Diorama Collection, the designer has used some artistic licence – the control stations should sit at the top of the stairs, but are at the bottom, the window behind the Emperor is smaller than in the movie and of course the number of steps has been significantly reduced.

This Darth Vader minifigure has appeared before, but the Emperor is fresh. The decoration on the torso and legs has been updated, a sideways move from the last version, but the head is really distinct – the creepy evil eyes look fantastic. Luke Skywalker has an excellent new wig that captures his Return of the Jedi look well.

75352 Emperor's Throne Room Diorama is in no way the most thrilling Star War set to build, but it's such an impressive display piece when complete that it is still easy to recommend. ■

Luke has a new hair element.



Price: £69.99, \$79.99, €79.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 608

75353 ENDOR SPEEDER CHASE DIORAMA

Luke and Leia are hot on the heels of a Biker Scout on the Forest Moon of Endor

Words & Pics: Graham E. Hancock

VERDICT

Capturing motion in a model isn't easy, yet this set demonstrates how effective it can be when it succeeds.

70/100

IT'S GREAT THAT 75353 Endor Speeder Chase Diorama has been released alongside 75352 Emperor's Throne Room Diorama for the 40th anniversary of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi. The two models are visually different in terms of form and colour, but also completely different to build thanks to their unique compositions.

Natural environments are notoriously difficult to offer as official LEGO models – when building MOCs, fans can use a whole variety of methods to ensure that nothing is uniform. Builders can utilise many different hues, an excessive number of plant elements or even apply bricks in unorthodox ways.

The LEGO Group's professional designers

have more limitations to work with. They must reduce complexity and carefully balance the elements in each box. Despite that, the floor area of this set, representing the Endor forest where the Speeder Bike chase takes place, does a great job using angled plates and carefully arranged plant pieces.

Two trees are a little bit on the square side, but the scale forces them to be that way – if they were made to be rounder, they'd get thicker and pull focus away from the Speeder Bikes. The colour and texturing up the trunks is excellent, with angled tops suggesting that they actually grow even higher, but have been 'cut off' for the sake of the diorama.

The Speeder Bikes are an entirely new design and are the best looking 74-Zs yet. The proportions are great, the use of newer elements is good and the minifigures can hold the handlebars easily. There's even room for two

minifigures on one bike, so you can recreate the scene where Luke and Leia share a ride.

What's really nice is that you can adjust the Speeder Bikes as they are attached to the base with a pole and the Collectible Minifigures posing element. You can create very dynamic chase scenes by just adjusting this slightly.

All of the minifigures in the set are new – and Luke Skywalker is very long overdue in his Endor outfit. Both of the Rebels have great prints, similar enough to belong together but different enough to capture the film correctly. The Scout Trooper is incredibly detailed, it's the same minifigure that appeared in 75292 The Razor Crest.

This doesn't have quite the same display presence as the more enclosed scenes, but delivers a satisfying sense of motion that is difficult to capture in a static model. ■



Luke and Leia won't let the Scout get away.

Price: £59.99, \$64.99, €64.99 / **Characters:** 4 / **Pieces:** 567

71417 FLIPRUS SNOW ADVENTURE

Mario's on an icy adventure in Filprus Lake featuring a trio of enemies

Words & Pics: Graham E. Hancock

VERDICT

This set captures the feel of Frosted Glacier while offering a nice balance between build and play.

66/100

IF YOU'VE PLAYED New Super Mario Bros. U, then you'll know exactly where the Filprus turn up – the secret Filprus Lake course that's part of the Frosted Glacier. Filprus enemies are perhaps better known from their more frequent and accessible appearances in New Super Luigi U. Either way, they have a fun character design that's typical of this franchise.

It's absolutely great to see the design team continuing to mine the full spectrum of Super Mario titles and offer a variety of settings. One of the unsung successes in this theme is the colour choice, which always makes it clear exactly what biome Mario is bounding through. 71417 Fliprus Snow

Adventure does that to perfection, using bright blue, medium azur, transparent light blue and white.

This set does a good job of having some 'proper building' to do, while also offering a good footprint for play. The main snowy and icy platform uses large panels for elevation, but has a bit of Technic building and careful construction to get a mechanism inside. It takes another type of building,



with careful element choices, to build the snowman and icicles on top.

Filprus sits on a mechanism-based section that fans of this theme will recognise, as it uses Technic beams to work, but covers them in plates and tiles so you almost forget that they're there. The rest of the model is made up of smaller builds and large platform elements to expand the course. A new moulded tile (element 3160), intended to be a frozen surface, is used and is very effective – it does feel like a throwback to the late 1990s though in terms of how specialised it is.

Of course the characters need building too – Filprus is the highlight. The walrus-like creature is fun to put together and through careful use of curved elements really represents the enemies

from the game well. The baby penguin is a more straightforward model, but will have you smiling as soon as you start to build it.

Once the set's built and you bring out the interactive Mario figure, it's a nice one to play through, offering a rather complete package. Hitting a lever behind the Freezie knocks the enemy over and reveals a hidden fruit. Mario can munch down on it himself or gift it to the baby penguin.

There's a platform above the Freezie and if Mario swings it correctly, the snowman's head will roll right off and knock over the Koopa Troopa on the ice below. Mario can skate over there and defeat the enemy. On the subject of skating, Mario recognises the surface and earns coins for slipping and sliding.

To defeat the Filprus, Mario must jump on the

platform to get rid of the snowballs (while not being hit), to leave space for him to sneak up and jump on the enemy from behind.

Perhaps the loveliest touch in this set is that once all of the enemies are defeated and the penguin has been befriended, Mario can wrap up his escapades with a marshmallow over the fire. Hopping on the space next to the fire causes special animation on his chest and sound effects that give a really cosy feeling.

Recent sets in the Super Mario have found a nice balance between build and play. 71417 Fliprus Snow Adventure continues that trend and includes a great enemy in the Filprus – if you like this range and need a new setting, it's worth adding to your layout. ■

■ ONE OF THE UNSUNG SUCCESSSES IN THIS THEME IS THE COLOUR CHOICE ■



Price: £54.99, \$59.99, €59.99 / **Characters:** 4 / **Pieces:** 588

71418 CREATIVITY TOOLBOX

This colourful set includes three different Mario worlds in one box

Words & Pics: Graham E. Hancock

VERDICT

Despite having 'creativity' in the title, this set brings nothing new to the Super Mario theme.

40/100

WHEN LOOKING AT the box and reading the name of this set, you feel you're in for a treat. 71418 Creativity Toolbox suggests that this will unlock new ways to build LEGO Super Mario levels, doing something interesting like 71380 Master Your Adventure did.

What was great about 71380 Master Your Adventure is that it did really encourage creativity – you can customise the blocks in the set to really make levels the way you want them to be. A special brick-built contraption is used with Mario to choose what attributes the blocks will have – genuinely combining physical and digital play.

By contrast, 71418 Creativity Toolbox simply has you building a variety of place-setting items for your Mario courses. There are instructions for simple platforms and backdrops, with some more specific models to convey particular biomes.

The directions encourage you to combine this set with one of the three Starter Courses to make our own level... but that's what every Expansion Set does. What makes this a 'Creativity Toolbox' is

71418 SIMPLY HAS YOU BUILDING A VARIETY OF PLACE-SETTING ITEMS FOR YOUR MARIO COURSES

completely unclear – it's just a less focused way of expanding your existing layouts.

Despite the set not offering the creativity that it promises, there are still some nice builds within the model. Wendy is a great character with a fantastic

expression, sitting atop a turret in the middle of some lava platforms.

The palm trees are a nice touch and the tilted statue looks good. The more place-setting builds, such as the various mountains and the clouds, are handy but will require careful placing to get the proper forced perspective.

As for the gameplay, the Checkpoint Flag is a nice addition. It adds time to your course, so Mario can continue on his way after his time would otherwise have expired. There are also fruits to collect and a gift box.

Fundamentally though, this set is better for those who already have multiple Super Mario sets rather than those who only own a Starter Course. It's far from essential but does allow you to expand the scope of your layout. ■

The disparate elements can be combined however you like.



Price: £12.99, \$14.99, €14.99 / **Characters:** 1 / **Pieces:** 130

71414 CONKDOR'S NOGGIN BOPPER

Does this set offer more than just the best name of the year?

Words & Pics: Graham E. Hancock

A SIMPLE, WELL-EXECUTED idea is sometimes all a set needs. While characters in the Mario theme are usually squared off, changing their typical rounded form into something more angular, Konkдор is rendered very closely to the enemy's actual video game look.

Building the model is satisfying, with this being closer to a typical LEGO model than some other Super Mario sets. The fun continues in the gameplay, with Mario needing to leap on the platform quickly enough to make it attack but avoid its beak. He can then jump on its head to defeat it. What completes the package is that leaping on the

springboard sends the Konkдор back to its original position.

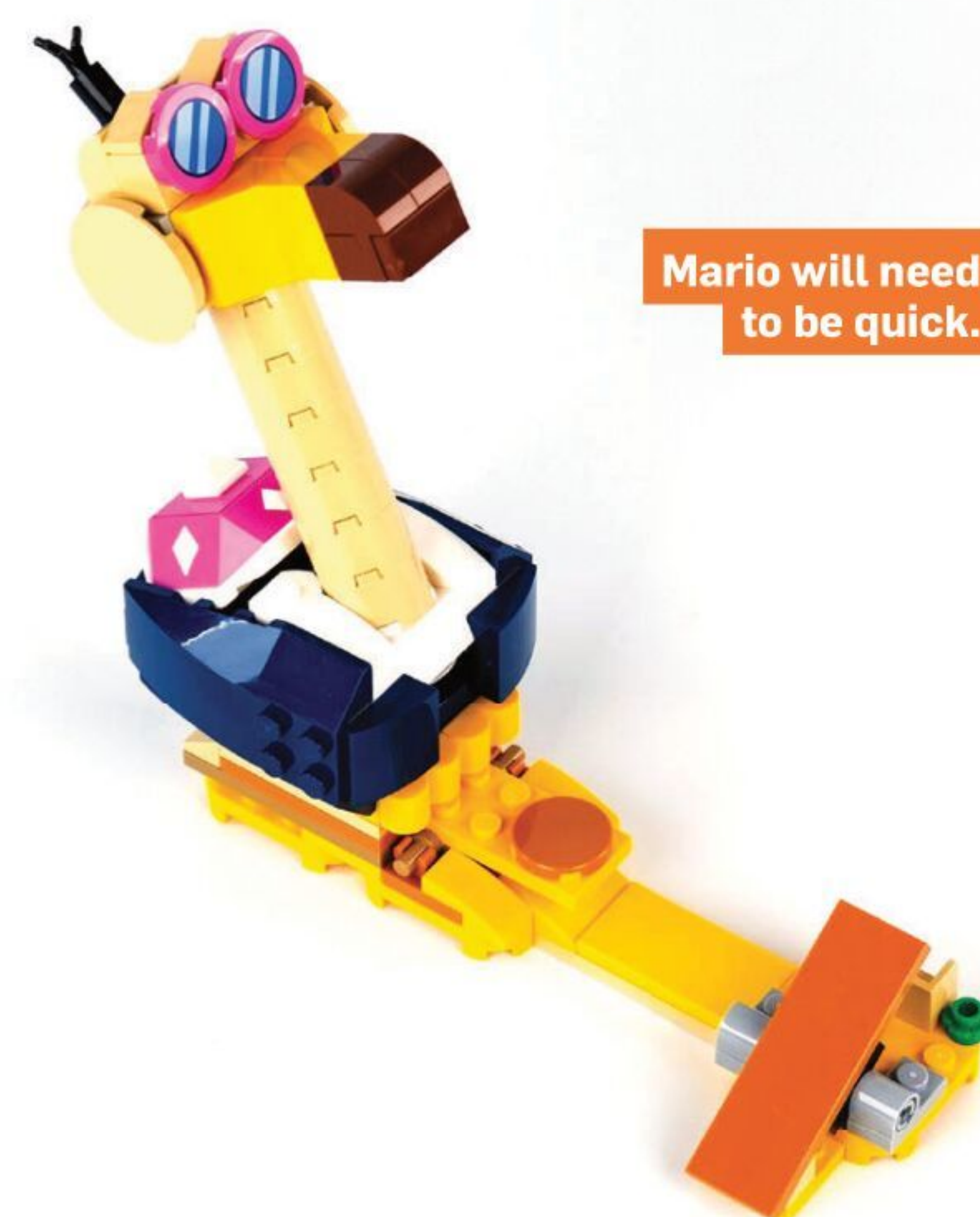
This feels much better value than the Power-Up Packs, providing a nice build and delivering a fun bit of gameplay. It's worth adding to your layout. ■

CONKDOR IS RENDERED VERY CLOSELY TO THE ENEMY'S ACTUAL LOOK ■■

VERDICT

This set offers great value, providing a fun build and great bit of gameplay.

54/100



Mario will need to be quick.



Price: £31.99, \$34.99, €37.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 327

76257 WOLVERINE CONSTRUCTION FIGURE

Is there more than nostalgia to be found in this fresh LEGO take on Wolverine?

Words & Pics: Anthony Walker-Cook

ALTHOUGH THE X-MEN have been largely absent from the LEGO Marvel theme, Wolverine has been a steady presence over the past few years, whether it be in 76073 Might Micros: Wolverine vs Magneto or 76202 Wolverine Mech Armour. Now he's included in the new construction figure sub theme.

This is the Wolverine that many of us know (and love) from the 1990s X-Men: The Animated Series. Yellow spandex rarely, if ever, looks good, but here the sharp contrast between the yellow and black torso with the blue pants and shoulder pads looks great. The printed

SOME DISTINCTIVE ODDITIES MEAN THE FIGURE HAS LIMITED DISPLAY VALUE

belt buckle with the 'X' is a particular treat and building the torso fills you with nostalgia.

The cowl is well put together, if a little bulky, and the printed headpiece perfectly captures the character's bold confidence; it's as if he's saying 'bub' as you're building and then playing with him.

There are some distinctive oddities that mean the figure has limited display value. Where other superheroes tend to have suits that cover all of their bodies, Wolverine's biceps and elbows are bare, which does not translate well when made from bricks, with the elbows looking rather flimsy.

Wolverine is also famously stocky, standing at just 5'3", but this figure stands as tall as the others in the range, hanging around the 9" mark. The head is attached by a ball joint that forces it to sit at a right angle, giving the character an awkward stoop. The famous claws are once more created using helicopter blades, which makes the character's proportions look a little distorted (but do add play value).

From a distance, the figure looks great, but upon closer inspection these aesthetic flaws begin to tell.

The box for Wolverine Construction Figure acknowledges the upcoming release of X-Men '97, the spiritual successor to the beloved X-Men: The Animated Series. This new set is hopefully a hint that more X-Men sets are on the horizon; let's just hope that they offer better value for money than this one. ■

VERDICT

Nostalgia can't hide some bizarre choices in this Wolverine figure.

56/100



Wolverine wears his classic outfit.

Price: £31.99, \$34.99, €37.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 310

76258 CAPTAIN AMERICA CONSTRUCTION FIGURE

Does America's greatest hero live up to his billing?

Words & Pics: Anthony Walker-Cook

VERDICT

There's plenty to enjoy with this set, but there are a few quirks in its design.

63/100

FOR THOSE WHO have become somewhat bored of mech builds in recent years, the recent foray into buildable action figures has produced some enjoyable and promising results. This is particularly apparent with 76258 Captain America Construction Figure.

This set captures many of the character's best features. The dark blue works wonderfully against the white and red accents, whilst the brown boots and gloves provide further colour variety.

The torso build in particular looks great, with the white and red mid-rift expertly put together; ingot pieces in red, brown and silver are used on the torso to add texture and detail to great effect. Cap's chest has a central star motif that's printed on a round plate that also adds a pleasing bit of sparkle to the dark blue.

There is some great articulation throughout the set, with ball joints in the knees and shoulders neatly covered by circulated plates and shell plates respectively. It's weird that

THERE IS SOME GREAT ARTICULATION THROUGHOUT THE SET

the figure only has four fingers, a point that the (superbly printed) shield cannot hide. The shield itself is securely fastened onto Steve's left hand using a Technic pin plate and therefore means the figure can be positioned in a variety of exciting and dynamic poses.

There are some other blemishes. Unfortunately, the character's ass as it appears in this set is disappointingly flat. This perhaps wouldn't be so much of a problem if the figure wasn't designed to allow you to place the shield on Captain America's back, thus drawing attention to the lacklustre booty.

The printed headpiece, whilst very detailed, uses a hue for the skin that doesn't match the fingers. When it comes to the great articulation, there's a trade off as the use of ball joints on the knees and ankles makes the figure feel a little flimsy.

The build experience peaks early on with the torso, leaving the somewhat repetitive arms and legs at the end. Therefore, whilst the set is on its way to being star-spangled awesome, it isn't completely successful, which might have been more forgivable if not for its steep £31.99 price tag. Maybe next time. ■



Price: £12.99, \$14.99, €15.99 / **Minifigures:** 2 / **Pieces:** 130

76260 BLACK WIDOW AND CAPTAIN AMERICA MOTORCYCLES

Race to fight the bad guys with two key Avengers

Words & Pics: Anthony Walker-Cook

2015'S AVENGERS: AGE of Ultron opens with a bang as the titular super group raid a Hydra facility. Whilst Thor and Iron Man fly through the sky, Captain America and Black Widow are left to more pedestrian means of transport – their trusty motorbikes.

The motorbikes presented in this set are wholly brick built, meaning their proportions alongside the minifigures look somewhat unfeasible. There are some attempts beyond just colour schemes to make the two distinctive – Black Widow's bike is ever so slightly sleeker – although the build process for the two bikes is mostly identical.

Small details such as the saddlebags on Captain America's bike differentiate the two and luckily the build process is too short to drag. Perhaps one bike alongside a small tundra build would've been better and offered more play and display value.

However, Black Widow's torso printing is particularly great, with a shimmering pearl

grey jumpsuit; the Captain America minifigure similarly has a torso that's intricately detailed. Both figures have dual-printed heads.

The two bikes will allow superheroes in training to race across any surface, a reminder that it's your imagination that makes a LEGO set, not just the bricks that are included. ■

The minifigure-to-build proportions are a little off.



BLACK WIDOW'S TORSO PRINTING IS GREAT



VERDICT

Two good minifigures can't disguise the repetitive motorbike builds.

46/100

Price: £8.99, \$9.99, €9.99 / **Mini-dolls:** 2 / **Pieces:** 109

41733 MOBILE BUBBLE TEA SHOP

Is this a good brew or does it need extra sugar?

Words & Pics: Kat Rees-Jauke

WHILE ICED FRAPPÉS and pumpkin spice lattes may be all the rage, bubble tea is also a highly grammable beverage. Originally from Taiwan, it mixes tea with fruit juice, milk and tapioca pearls, into a very unique drink. So, is 41733 worth the bubble, toil and trouble of building?

Everything about this set oozes charm. The tea shop is only eight studs long, using teal and light yellow bricks for a striking colour combination. Yellow 1x2 bowed bricks create a counter that's covered in 1x1 cylinders with new prints to suggest the. Advertising it all is an adorable mascot that ingeniously uses a LEGO droid element in lavender for the first time, with a candle then doubling as a straw.

Both Nova and Matilde are exclusive, with the latter featuring a new barista apron print, which is impressive for one of the smallest sets in the theme this year. Due to its size, most of

the details across the build require stickers, yet between the bounty of new colourful elements and the two exclusive mini-dolls, 41733 Mobile Bubble Tea Shop is a bubbly bargain. ■

Bubble tea time.



VERDICT

A fresh concept that translates into a charming little set filled with surprise elements.

52/100

EVERYTHING ABOUT THIS SET OOZES CHARM

Price: £24.99, \$29.99, €29.99 / **Minifigures:** 3 / **Pieces:** 346

41728 HEARTLAKE DOWNTOWN DINER

Ignore Alan Jackson's advice, it's time to rock the jukebox at the Downtown Diner

Words & Pics: Graham E. Hancock

VERDICT

This dining location isn't trying to be a full meal, but makes for an excellent small plate.

64/100

It's oversized sub time.

There's an arcade game and a jukebox.



ONE OF THE great things about Friends and City, the two real-life LEGO themes, is that they are not inspired by any one location. Influences from all over the world come to bear on these sets, so you can build your idyllic tabletop town in whatever way you like, combining different cultures and styles.

41728 Heartlake Downtown Diner is clearly influenced by archetypal US diners that are associated with the 1950s. Red and white is the typical colour scheme for such a location, so in this model that is used for the roof. Bright bluish green and white capture a quintessential colour pairing for this type of building, with the vibrant coral elements providing a nice LEGO Friends twist.

The large windows and curved shape match the American diner you picture in your mind, as does the cleverly shaped arrow on the side. The

design team continues to put their own spin on things though, as rather than a drive-through for cars, Liann is collecting her order on a skateboard.

Priced at just £24.99, the set offers a building

RATHER THAN A DRIVE-THROUGH FOR CARS, LIANN IS ON A SKATEBOARD

façade with a small amount of floor space inside. There you'll find a counter with some nice detail, tile patterning and a jukebox. A neat little feature allows you to literally rock the jukebox.

You know a set's footprint isn't big enough though when a separate floor section is built to

accommodate a table and seating. This looks perfect for a booth, but of course it isn't – it's presented as a freestanding table.

That means that if you're looking for an eatery to add to your tabletop town, 41747 Heartlake City Community Kitchen offers a much more complete experience than 41728 Heartlake Downtown Diner does. The former is more than twice the price of the latter though, so you're paying for the additional piece count that allows for more space.

For what it is, 41728 delivers a flavour of Americana and if that's what you need to add to your tabletop town, it delivers it at a reasonable price. You wouldn't expect a fuller building for this low price – and sure enough, you don't get one. ■

Price: £62.99, \$67.99, €69.99 / **Mini-dolls:** 4 / **Pieces:** 695

41747 HEARTLAKE CITY COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Is it possible to resist a set that offers fresh tacos and al fresco dining?

Words & Pics: Graham E. Hancock

VERDICT

This colourful and detail-packed model works alongside modular buildings or in a fan-built town layout.

76/100

THE REIMAGINED LEGO Friends theme is more determined than ever to distinguish each part of Heartlake City, so you can look at a set and immediately picture where it belongs. When you glance at 41747 Heartlake City Community Kitchen, you'll immediately recognise this as belonging in the most foodie, hipster part of town; a curving staircase to al fresco dining, overhead lighting and the connotations of a name like 'The Kitchen'.

If the laid back and colourful set didn't already imply California, the tacos on the menu make it clear that the US state might have influenced this model. It's a completely different take on eating than 41728 Heartlake Downtown Diner and it's great to have this diversity in the theme – your mini-dolls can choose from a variety of dining options in your Heartlake City layout.

What's nice about building this set is that there's a mix of interior detailing and exterior construction, ensuring that things don't get dull. It's like a mini modular building, with a decent amount of tiling necessary for the pavement, little kitchen builds for the inside and layered bricks for the external walls.

Constructing the food prep area is really fun as it demonstrates some great part usage. Printed food items, like limes and tacos, are nice to see given that the LEGO diet once consisted entirely of pizza. Building up the outdoor steps is also intriguing, as a new element named Newel-step (it also appears in 43215 The Enchanted Treehouse) is used. These elements are stacked then swivelled, completing a curving staircase more elegantly than a single moulded element can.

Even the colour of pavement has been carefully selected to give the impression of an old town area, with variation in the paving suggesting it has been worn over time. The width of that paving matches up with 41732 Downtown Flower and Design Stores, so you can put these builds together just like the Icons modular buildings.

The size of this set doesn't scream value for money, but when you consider the detail that's packed into it and how well scaled it is with sets like 41732, it isn't as overpriced as first impressions suggest. It's a colourful addition to your real-life LEGO display, delivering a venue that seems modern and relevant. The refreshed LEGO Friends theme continues to deliver. ■

The only place to be on Taco Tuesday.



Abuelita is busy in the kitchen.



Price: £39.99, \$39.99, €44.99 / **Minifigures:** 4 / **Pieces:** 344

60388 GAMING TOURNAMENT TRUCK

LEGO City dives into the world of competitive gaming to see if those minifigure hands can manipulate a controller

Words & Pics: Anthony Walker-Cook

THE LEGO CITY theme is embracing some of the alternative aspects of modern life in the 2023 sets. 60388 Gaming Tournament Truck marks a welcome addition to and departure from the theme's more traditional builds by shining a light on the world of competitive gaming.

The rise of streaming and the increasing prominence of gaming tournaments across all consoles and franchises means this new offering in LEGO City will have an appeal to LEGO fans of all ages.

The truck's colour scheme of black with a lime green border makes for a surprisingly striking set on the outside, whilst the gaming controller figurehead at the top of the truck is simply but effectively created using just 13 pieces. The white interior also adds a reprieve from the black exterior, whilst movable gaming chairs add depth to the set.

A stylish cockpit uses neon plates to represent the truck's lights; a transparent green screen protects a simple trophy to be given to the tournament's winner. The back of the truck is particularly nice, as it incorporates a shop

THE TRUCK'S COLOUR SCHEME OF BLACK WITH A LIME GREEN BORDER MAKES FOR A SURPRISINGLY STRIKING SET

for spectators to purchase merchandise from. It's good to know materialism is so rampant in society that it's depicted in a LEGO set.

The competitive element is inventively captured in the set through a sliding mechanism.

The player's avatars – a katana-wielding mage and a fire demon with a powerful pink fist – are set on sliding pieces that can move along the truck's screen to suggest who is winning.

Of the four minifigures included, the two gamers are wearing clothes that specifically tie into their character's weapons of choice and their hair colours are likewise the same as their avatar's broader colour schemes. A commentator and fan are also included, both are nondescript figures.

Given that some are calling for eSports to be included in future Olympic games, it will be interesting to see where else gaming could feature in the LEGO City theme. The Gaming Tournament Truck is certainly a sound starting point, but we'll have to wait and see if future sets will level up this topic. ■

VERDICT

This set gives eSports a sound introduction to the LEGO City theme.

57/100

The controller sign is simply made but looks great.



Consumerism is alive in LEGO City.

Let the games begin.

Price: £89.99, \$99.99, €99.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 1,810

31208 HOKUSAI – THE GREAT WAVE

LEGO Art continues to push out of the frame in a set that replicates a bona fide masterpiece

Words & Pics: Kat Rees-Jauke

CHANGING HIS NAME more than 30 times and producing thousands of woodblock prints over his lifetime, Hokusai was an enigmatic artist with an eye for striking compositions depicting the beauty of the Japanese landscape. The Great Wave is

his most famous work, recognisable across the world, interpreted by other artists and featured on all kinds of merchandise. Yet its creation was in the ukiyo-e tradition – it was basically the historic equivalent of a cheap poster. Now though,

The Great Wave hangs in The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and its most recent interpretation is 31208. How can such a dynamic painting translate into a wave of plastic bricks?

If 21333 Vincent Van Gogh – The Starry

VERDICT

A masterful model that combines Art's mosaics with three-dimensionality in a unique build.

83/100



The Great Wave was painted in 1831.

Night was combined with a LEGO Art set, then 31208 Hokusai – The Great Wave is the result. It combines some of the best aspects of both styles, recreating the finer details in mosaic, but adding three-dimensional elements for texture. In woodblock printing techniques, which is how the original painting was made, separate blocks are printed onto paper to achieve different layers of colour. This means that the base colour will always be visible, so it becomes an essential part of the composition. In this case that's the salmon pink of the sky. To recreate this effect the 16x16 art baseplates have been recoloured into LEGO light nougat, which is incredibly similar to the pink in the original artwork.

Dark blue plates then begin to make the outline of the wave, topped with various white tiles for the ocean spray. While it starts off looking quite angular and sharp, each layer softens these harsh

LEGO angles, bringing it closer to a rounded curve. Dark blue was the perfect choice, almost as dark as Prussian blue. Art curators believe Hokusai deliberately chose Prussian blue, an imported paint from Europe, to suggest how Japan was ending 200 plus years of isolationism. Light blue plates then act as the highlights, though incorporating a third blue would have elevated this model even more because the wave is missing those mid-tones.

With the Art theme there is always some repetition, which is thankfully limited only to the background for this model, as 1x1 round tiles add the clouds surrounding a far-off Mount Fuji. From there things quickly diversify as the lower half of the picture focusses on the actual wave. Plates build up its base, mainly dark blue 2x6 and 1x4 pieces, which are then softened as other elements layer to make the model three-dimensional.

It's an interesting choice by the designers to take a completely flat, two-dimensional woodblock and add this extra dimension. Not only does it allow for more details to be incorporated than if the entire build had been a mosaic, but it creates a lot of visual interest when the model is completed.

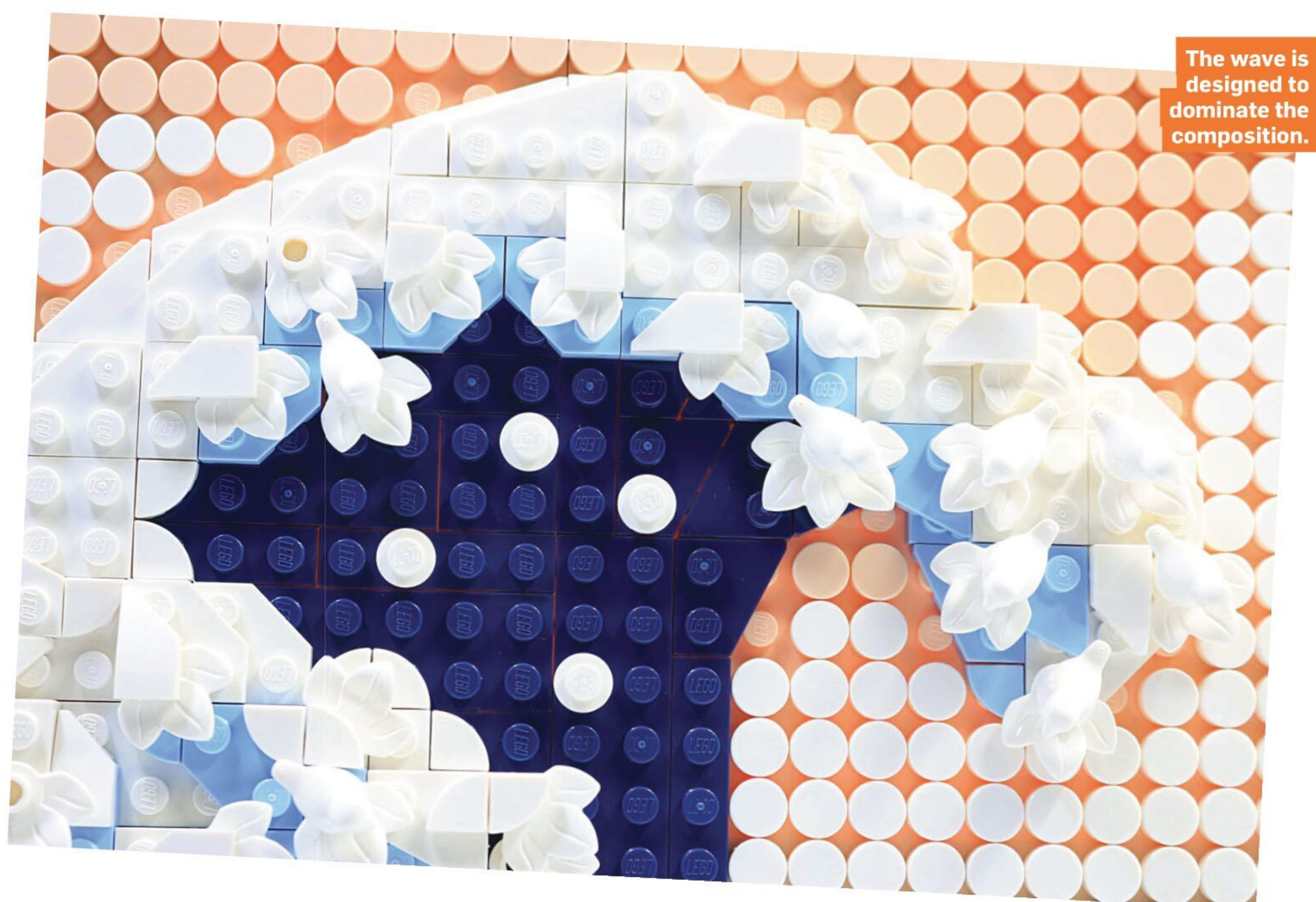
It also allows for some incredible parts usage, with the designers really pushing what certain elements can do. One highlight is the use of LEGO bird elements, unprinted and fully moulded in white, to mimic the texture of the foam from the

original painting. Even with some slight changes, 31208 stays remarkably true to its source material. The main way it deviates is the fishing boats. These should be light nougat – an area of the background that has been left to show through in the actual painting. However, that would have required recolouring a lot of LEGO plates and the light tan is a decent compromise.

As for the fishermen in these boats, they surprisingly use new printed 1x1 tiles. Considering they are hardly visible, or given any noticeable features in The Great Wave, this printing seems a little out of place. For all the delicate beauty throughout the rest of the model, these plates almost seem a bit cartoonish in comparison. At least that is how they appear when the model is viewed closely. It is more effective from afar, and the accompanying frame showcases the set perfectly. It's inspired by the actual frame that's used by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, with 6x6 Technic frames building a base that is then finished using large white and light tan tiles.

While the frame is completely effective, it does mean that when finished, 31208 Hokusai – The Great Wave is very big. With its delicate colours and sheer size, this is a model that needs a feature space on a wall, uninterrupted by anything else. For fans who have this type of canvas, it will look absolutely stunning. The build combines the subtle tones and dynamic shapes of the original into a three-dimensional model with an incredible level of detail. ■

■ IT'S AN INTERESTING CHOICE BY THE DESIGNERS TO TAKE A COMPLETELY FLAT, TWO-DIMENSIONAL WOODBLOCK AND ADD THIS EXTRA DIMENSION ■■



The wave is designed to dominate the composition.

HALL OF FAME

The sets you need in your collection, according to Blocks reviewers

1

10294 Titanic

i Theme: For Adults / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 88



That Titanic has been executed at this size with such a solid and detailed set is remarkable.

100/100

2

21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay

i Theme: Ideas / **Year:** 2020 / **Issue:** 67



Combines the nostalgia of classic Pirates with a sophisticated building experience, for a true LEGO masterpiece.

100/100

3

10265 Ford Mustang

i Theme: Creator Expert / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 55



Easily the coolest car to come out of the Creator Expert theme, the Ford Mustang fine-tunes LEGO vehicle design to perfection.

100/100

4

76139 1989 Batmobile

i Theme: DC Super Heroes / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 64



An incredible way to celebrate Batman's twin anniversaries in 2019, this is the greatest LEGO Batmobile.

99/100

5

76391 Hogwarts Icons – Collectors' Edition

i Theme: Wizarding World / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 83



These Harry Potter props are a delight to build, but really impress thanks to the final model's exceptional visual composition.

99/100

6

70620 NINJAGO City

i Theme: The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 36



There are few sets that can compare to NINJAGO City's size, scope and almost overwhelming level of detail and technique.

98/100

7

10257 Carousel

i Theme: Creator Expert / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 34



This welcome addition to LEGO fairgrounds is a work of art, and far more detailed than its much-revered predecessor.

98/100

8

21317 Steamboat Willie

i Theme: Ideas / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 56



This monochromatic blast from Disney's past doesn't need any sprinkling of pixie dust, as it's pure magic from start to finish.

98/100

9

70904 Clayface Splat Attack

i Theme: The LEGO Batman Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 28



A creative and effective build that ensures a wide and valid appeal. Proof that great things come in small packages.

98/100

10

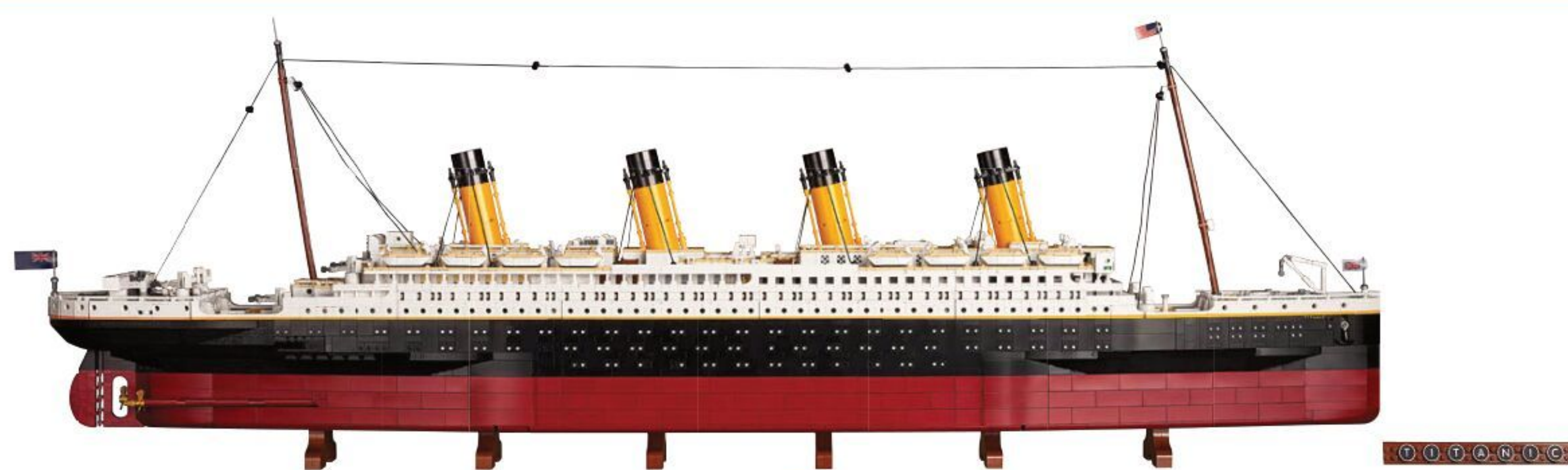
75313 AT-AT

i Theme: Star Wars / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 87



The Ultimate Collector Series AT-AT justifies its incredible piece count and delivers a toy that lives up to what fans have dreamed of.

97/100



11

71741 NINJAGO City Gardens

Theme: NINJAGO / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 77



This beautiful and detailed model is a worthy follow-up to 70620 NINJAGO City, using its incredible piece count to excellent effect.

97/100

12

70618 Destiny's Bounty

Theme: The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 36



A highly detailed and exquisitely-designed vessel (with not a moulded hull in sight) for the full roster of ninja to enjoy.

97/100

13

71411 The Mighty Bowser

Theme: LEGO Super Mario / **Year:** 2022 / **Issue:** 98



You really can't ask for much more than this from a LEGO character; this is Bowser.

96/100

14

10305 Lion Knights' Castle

Theme: Icons / **Year:** 2022 / **Issue:** 94



Nostalgia and history combine for a beautiful set that demands to be played with.

96/100

15

10497 Galaxy Explorer

Theme: Icons / **Year:** 2022 / **Issue:** 94



The size of 10497 Galaxy Explorer has been increased to make every adult who builds it feel like a child again – and it succeeds.

96/100

16

75192 Millennium Falcon

Theme: Star Wars / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 40



A nearly perfect immortalisation of the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy – as long as you can stomach the size and price.

96/100

17

10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander

Theme: Creator Expert / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 58



A timely and worthy celebration of a historic event, the Lunar Lander is a stunning display piece and rewarding build.

96/100

18

80105 Chinese New Year Temple Fair

Theme: Seasonal / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 65



This is a beautifully-presented set with no cut corners, no lack of attention to detail, and absolutely no reason to not pick it up.

96/100

19

76052 Batman Classic TV Series – Batcave

Theme: DC Super Heroes / **Year:** 2016 / **Issue:** 19



Offers an unrivalled Bat-experience, with plenty of Bat-love having gone into the Bat-design phase. Did we mention Bats?

96/100

20

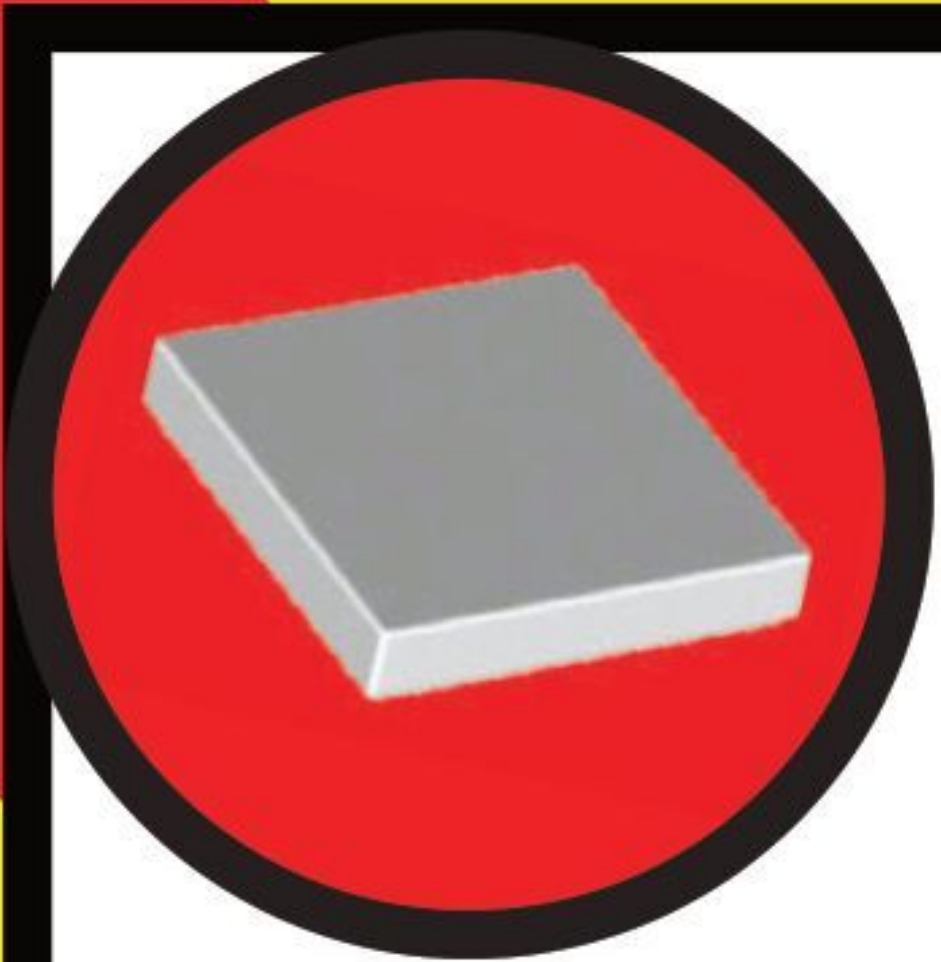
70841 Benny's Space Squad

Theme: The LEGO Movie 2 / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 53



The question isn't whether you should buy this colourful celebration of Classic Space, but how many copies is enough.

96/100



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ONLY THE BEST IS GOOD ENOUGH

Daniel Konstanski explores where the LEGO Group's famous motto came from and how literally it should be taken

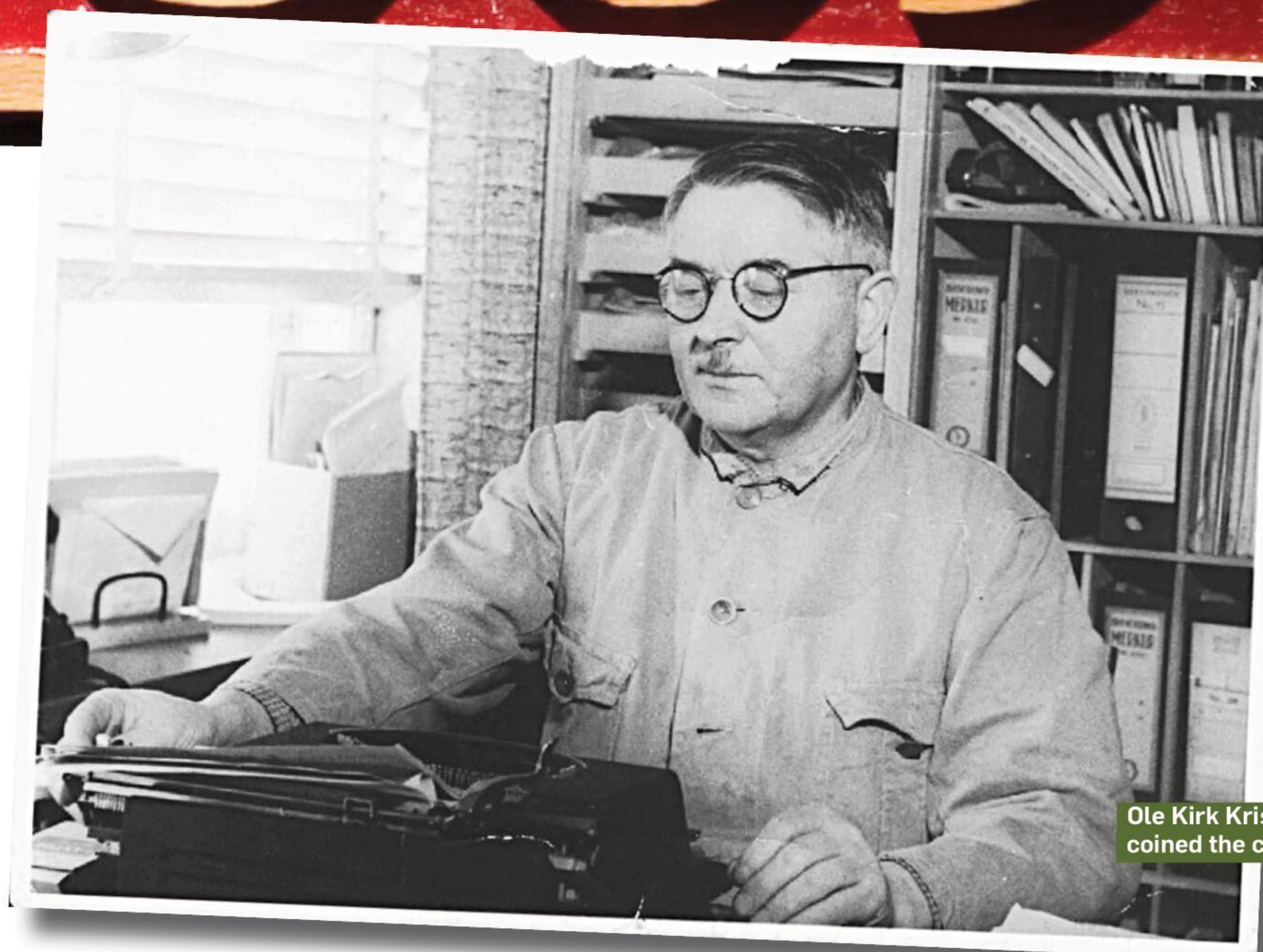
Words: Daniel Konstanski **Pics:** The LEGO Group, Daniel Konstanski, Graham E. Hancock

ONLY THE BEST is good enough. Through the years, the LEGO Group's motto has become, while not as famous as the beloved bricks it epitomises, quite well known in its own right. For those who work for the company it is much more than a quip – it is a creed.

However, it has been pointed out by company historians and other insiders that there is some confusion about the phrase. Not in what it has come to mean as a standard within the company, but in terms of what Ole Kirk Kristiansen, the LEGO Group's founder, meant by it in the first place.

This phrase is frequently invoked alongside the story of the LEGO patriarch ordering his son, Godtfred, to retrieve an order of wooden toys before they were loaded onto a train, because the youngster had given only two coats of varnish rather than the requisite three. The now legendary story is used to illustrate the commitment to quality.

A hand carved sign stating the LEGO motto.



Ole Kirk Kristiansen coined the company motto.

ORIGINS

Ole Kirk did not set out to be a toy maker. A trained professional carpenter, toys were considered beneath him by many of his contemporaries. Craftsmen, it was thought, should spend their time working on complicated projects such as barns or furniture, not simple things for children.

Thankfully for everyone who loves the brick, Ole Kirk disagreed. His formal training and experience working on large projects brought with them habits and mindsets. They had become self-imposed rules that the young carpenter, and later those who worked for him, followed. Most of these rules

centred on quality. The early 1900s was a time when best practices and industry standards were being formalised, for the first time ever in most professions.

Standards and innovation were of interest to Ole Kirk, as confirmed by what he wrote at the time. He was an ardent adherent of the Better Building Practices movement, which was spreading across Denmark during the early 1900s, going so far as to hire an architect steeped in the group's best practices to construct his famous Lion House in Billund. Ole Kirk's desire for quality was also the reason he installed one of the town's first sidewalks in front of his new abode, which caused some of his neighbours to wonder if he

Ole Kirk's house still stands in Billund, a testament to its quality.



was guilty of the sin of pride.

Ensuring that things were 'the best' was clearly a key priority for Ole Kirk in both his personal and professional life. It is here that the story of Godtfred's misadventures in varnish are enlightening.

Ole Kirk made the transition from large building projects to furniture and household goods, then from those to toys – yet he maintained the same standards of construction. At this time, furniture was given three coats of varnish to ensure it would last through years of use. In the absence of formal standards for toys, the carpenter and his craftsmen simply continued using the same practices as before despite being very different products.

That is why Ole Kirk ordered Godtfred, who had used only two coats of varnish on an order of toys in order to save money, to collect the

merchandise and give it the additional layer of varnish. Ole Kirk was applying the highest standard that he knew of. Clearly, only the best was good enough even back then. It was all about quality.

CULTURE

While there is certainly an aspect of the LEGO motto that stems from Ole Kirk's personal ethos, there is also a cultural aspect to it that cannot be discounted. The LEGO founder was born and raised in the rural Jutland region of Denmark at the turn of the century. It was a world that's almost inconceivable in 2023.

The residents of this region were known for being understated, humble, strong in faith and committed to such concepts as honouring one's word and taking personal pride in the work of their hands. This was in a time before exports and expansive markets. Most craftsmen in this region would be selling to their friends and family. Any shirking of quality would be noticed, and word would get around.

A commitment to quality was not something that originated with Ole Kirk; it was a vital aspect of the culture he was steeped in. Many of his friends and neighbours likely lived by similar, if not so succinctly expressed, creeds.

MEANING

As anyone with an understanding of language will confirm, translation can be a tricky business. While the motto of 'only the best is good enough' is well known in English, Ole Kirk didn't speak English, so the phrase was set down in Danish. In fact, there wasn't a firmly established English version until the 1980s. It turns out that the original phrase as remembered and recorded by those who heard Ole Kirk use it is actually somewhat tricky to translate.

According to records, Ole Kirk began using his motto in the late 1930s – declaring 'det bedste er ikke for godt.' Directly translated that reads 'the



Employees in the 1930s with the motto on the wall.

The phrase
is found at
company
offices around
the world.



best is not too good,' which is cumbersome English at best and confusing at worst. There is also evidence that the LEGO Group's founder sometimes used the statement in a tongue and cheek manner when responding to queries about how high the quality of his products needed to be. 'How good do things need to be?' 'The best isn't good enough!'

After starting to make toys, Ole Kirk is recorded as having added to his own saying making the full statement 'det bedste er ikke for godt – fordi børn fortjener det bedste,' with the latter part translating as 'because

children deserve the best.'

That addendum was a key piece of the puzzle for later LEGO employees looking to understand the exact meaning of their founder's words and part of what informed the eventual English translation.

Today it is largely understood that being the best is not the specific goal. Rather, striving to consistently do better is the objective. In other words, 'do your best today, and then come back tomorrow and see if you can do it a tiny bit better.' Looking at the evolution of modern LEGO products shows



Incremental
improvements
can be seen in
the evolution of
LEGO models.

Godtfred loved to stand on bricks to demonstrate their strength and quality.



that this is exactly what the company's employees have done through the decades. Each police station or X-wing starfighter is a little bit better than the last one.

IN PRACTICE

Anyone who steps on a LEGO brick quickly discovers the truth of the LEGO Group's creed. Godtfred Kirk Christiansen himself was fond of doing such a stunt at trade fairs and other industry events to demonstrate the strength of his company's bricks. However, he was always careful to wear shoes.

Through the years, 'only the best is good enough' has had very practical ramifications for the LEGO Group. Early on it meant investing large sums of money in the best moulding equipment available and then going beyond that to invent or perfect techniques.

In the 1980s, after the LEGO Group's patents began to expire, quality allowed them to rise above a variety of cheaper imitations that sought to carve off chunks of the construction market. Brands such as Tyco and Mega Bloks succeeded in making compatible bricks that were far less expensive, but those reduced costs were the result of cheaper materials and less robust production techniques. Children, it turned out, didn't want to play with bricks that deformed, cracked or failed to hold.

Even today, anyone who has tried to save money by acquiring one of the many knock-off LEGO products available online quickly finds that they are of far inferior quality. Even small imperfections add up when a product is made up of hundreds or thousands of elements. The LEGO Group has long known this and has been served well by their motto in keeping their products at the

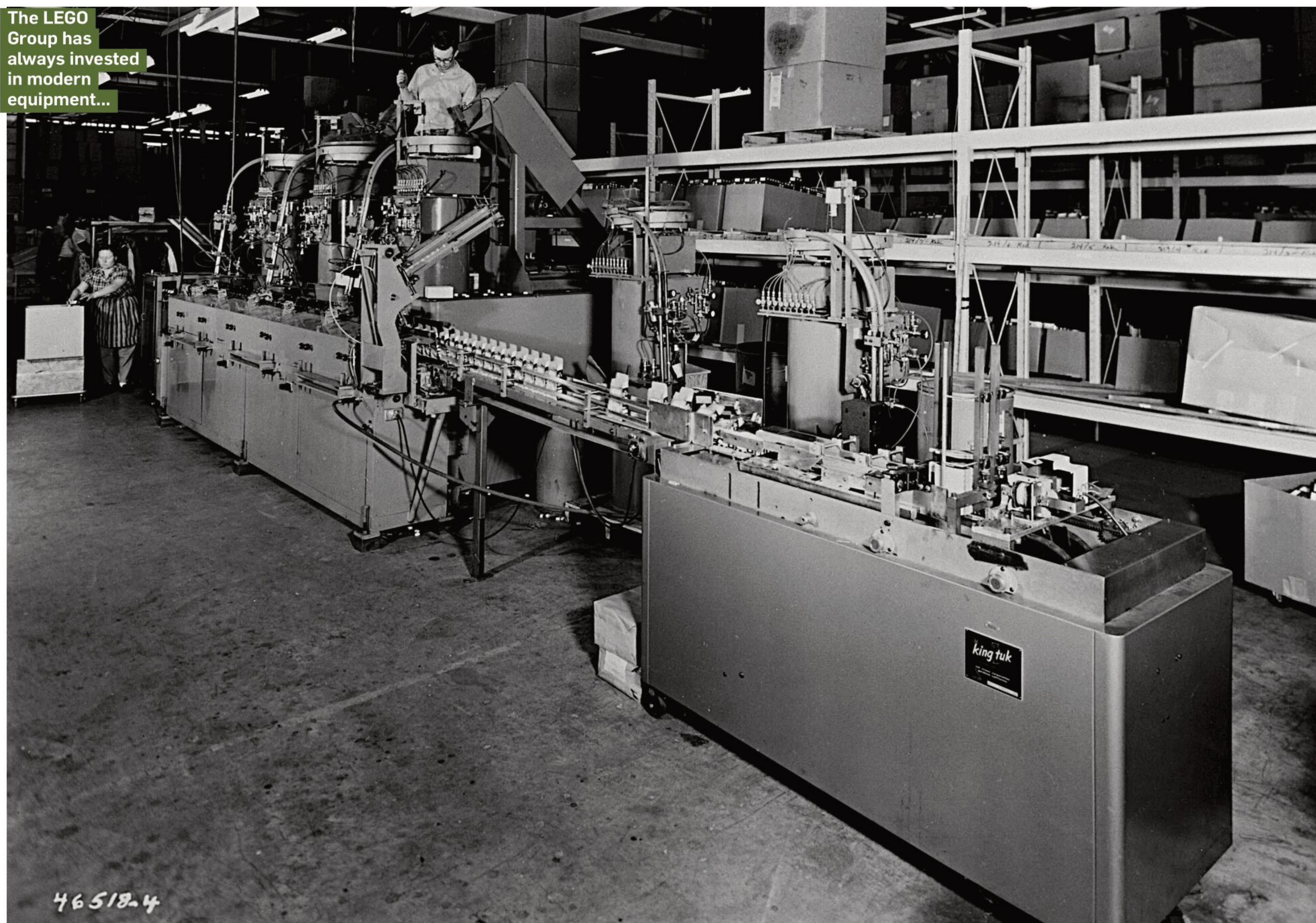
WE SHOULD ALWAYS STRIVE TO CREATE THE ABSOLUTE BEST PLAY EXPERIENCE

highest levels of quality so that models made of their bricks reliably hold together.

It is highly doubtful that Ole Kirk had any idea how far reaching his words would be back in the 1930s when he started using his motto. It is also impossible to know exactly what he meant by it. However, third generation LEGO owner Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen defined what his interpretation of the words spoken by his grandfather mean:

"Only the best is good enough" relates to the play experience. We should always strive to create the absolute best play experience. For our family, this is not just an expression, but the heart of who we are. From each brick created, to the very ethos of our enterprises and our daily lives, we always strive for better. To my grandfather it also meant to be humble – and to always strive to do better.' ■

The LEGO Group has always invested in modern equipment...



...and that continues today, with robotic assistants.



GOING CORPORATE THE LEGOVERSE'S COMPANIES

Daniel Konstanski details the history of the companies that have kept the LEGO world functioning over the years – and this is definitely, absolutely, for sure official canon...

Words: Daniel Konstanski **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski, Brickset, the LEGO Group

OCTAN, WHILE ONE of the few officially named companies, is far from the only in-universe LEGO corporation. Most of the others are only hinted at by inclusion of logos on various vehicles or minifigures through the years. Despite the lack of official names, there is a rich history of fictional companies, some of which seem to have gone out of business, while others are thriving to this day. Here are some of the companies that have been part of minifigure' lives over the years...

It's just business.



AIRPORT SHUTTLE

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6399 AIRPORT SHUTTLE, 1990
LAST APPEARANCE: 71029 SERIES 21, 2021

In 1990, a new company came to LEGO Town intent on making those trips to the airport terminal a little bit easier. With a stylised 'T' on the sides of its monorail cars, Airport Shuttle Company provided a snazzy alternative to trains, and could even climb an incline. All of that track must have been expensive to make a return on, as their service only lasted a couple years before vanishing forever.

Perhaps their lack of success had something to do with the elongated, looping route it took to traverse what was otherwise a straight-line distance of only a few baseplates. Minifigures could walk from station to station faster than the monorail car could get them there.

There appears to be at least some nostalgia amongst the minifigure population for the company, as its logo turned up on the flight pin of the costumed airplane aficionado who appeared in Collectible Minifigures Series 21.



The Airport Shuttle company operated for a couple of years, starting in 1990.

A Horn Post Office from the 1980s.



HORN MAIL DELIVERY

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6362 POST OFFICE, 6651 POST OFFICE VAN AND 6372 TOWN HOUSE, 1982
LAST APPEARANCE: 7732 AIR MAIL AND 7731 MAIL VAN, 2008

Replacing what we can only assume was express delivery by riders astride brick-built ponies, Horn Mail Delivery burst onto the scene in 1982 to meet all of the correspondence needs the minifigure populace might have.

Over its nearly three-decade run, the company's dedicated employees operated a fleet of vehicles from mail trucks and vans to train, cars and planes. Happy customers plastered Horn's distinctive logo on their mailboxes to let all the neighbours know they were Horn people.

After fading into obscurity during the late 2010s, Horn relaunched with a rebrand in 2020 as Zoom Mail, going so far as to make deliveries in the arctic with their new 60250 Mail Plane (no wonder the delivery person wasn't smiling).

The company's logo figured prominently on its employee's uniforms.

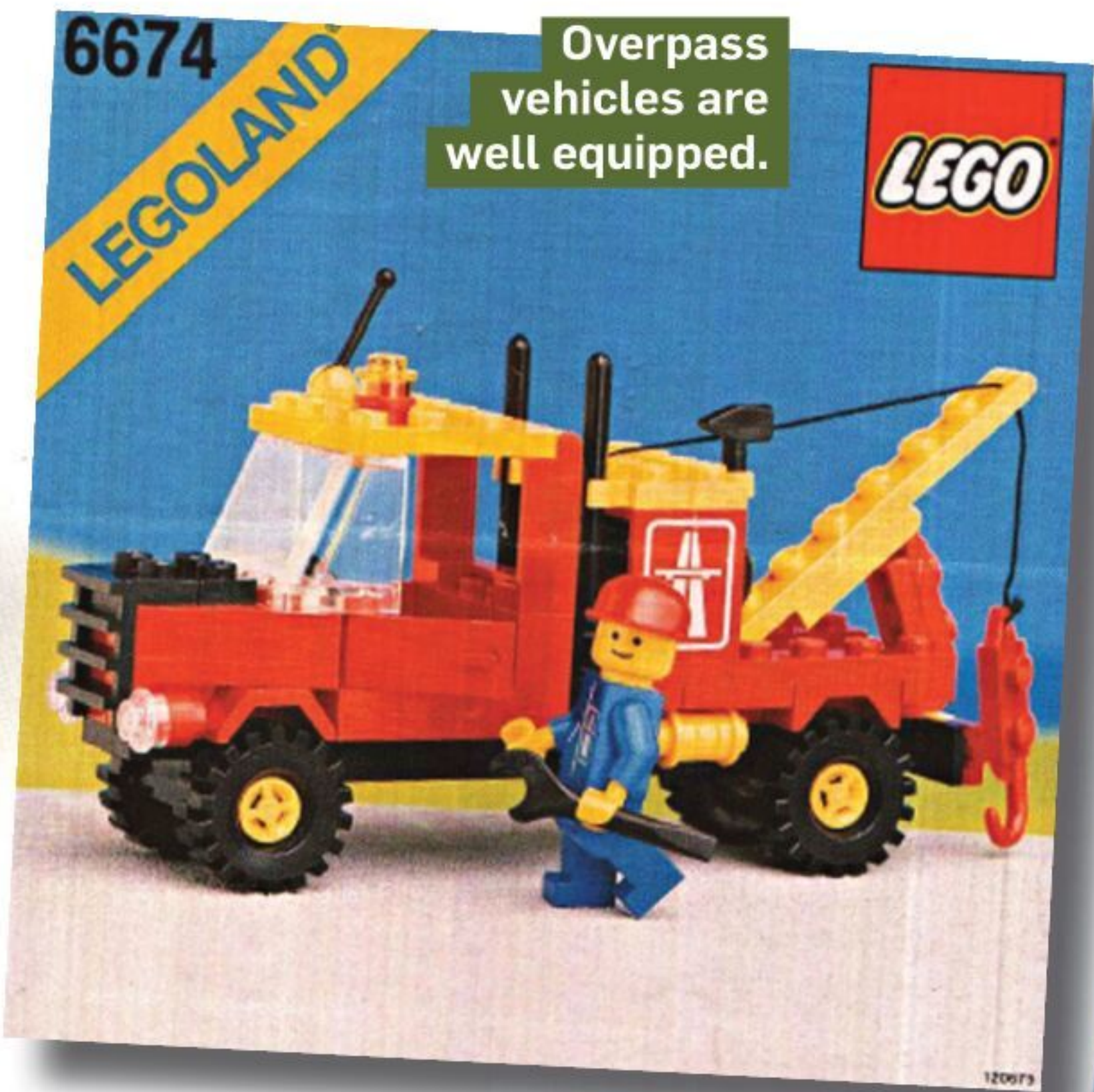


OVERPASS ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6653 HIGHWAY EMERGENCY VAN, 1982
LAST APPEARANCE: 6674 CRANE TRUCK, 1988

Overpass began as the dream of a single minifigure when they drove on the roads of Denmark and saw its overpass signs. They started the company in 1982, just riding around in an emergency van to help stranded citizens whose brick-built cars had lost pieces.

A reputation for reliable service quickly led to success, as in 1987 Overpass opened the massive 6393 Big-Rig Truck Stop. It boasted what was, at the time, the largest LEGO tow truck ever made. Unfortunately, the new rig and associated service centre stretched the company too thin, leading to financial woes that forced it to downsize back to a single vehicle in 1988, before it vanished completely.



The first set to sport the Overpass logo.



The logo also appeared on employee outfits.



CLASSIC AIR

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6392 AIRPORT, 1985

LAST APPEARANCE: 1475 AIRPORT SECURITY SQUAD AND 6440 JETPORT FIRE SQUAD, 1991

On a glorious spring day in 1986, Classic Airlines made air travel available to the minifigure masses when the company opened the first Town airport and began offering flights in the brand new 747 Brickliner. Expansion followed in 1990 when international operations began at a new sister airport, 6396 International Jetport.

Having cornered the airline market, Classic Air needed relevant support services for its sprawling airports, launching security and fire vehicles. A competitor, Aeroline, blew their existing facilities out of the water in 1994 with their state of the art 6597 Century Skyway. Minifigures of a certain age still tell fond stories of family vacations in the late 1980s beginning under the distinctive logo that depicted an aeroplane with coloured lines beneath it.

EITHER WAY SHIPPING

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6391 CARGO CENTRE, 1984

LAST APPEARANCE: 6377 DELIVERY CENTRE, 1985

After watching Horn Mail Delivery's success during the early 1980s, Either Way Shipping's founders realised there was a need for minifigures to be able to ship larger packages than Horn could accommodate. Either Way Shipping, so named due its logo's distinctive opposing arrows on either side of a central box, burst onto the scene in a big way during 1984 with the massive 6391 Cargo Center. It boasted a warehouse, loading dock, logistics centre and heliport all under one roof.

Piggybacking off of Classic Air's new airport, Either Way commenced air operations out of 6377 Delivery Center the following year, but it turned out there wasn't anywhere to fly the cargo to, so the company folded soon after.

Either Way's 6377 Delivery Center.





WORLDWIDE SHIPPING

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6375 TRANS AIR CARRIER, 1990

LAST APPEARANCE: 10764 CITY CENTRAL AIRPORT, 2018

Either Way Shipping's demise in the late 1980s created a massive hole in the market, which was filled in 1990 with the arrival of Worldwide Shipping. Started as an air carrier service, the company quickly expanded to maritime operations in 1991 with the massive 6542 Launch & Load Seaport and 6541 Intercoastal Seaport.

Worldwide was strong throughout the 1990s and further expanded during the early 2000s, fielding ever larger planes, trucks and ships before finally beginning to fade in the 2010s. The mighty had officially fallen in 2017 when Worldwide was reduced to operating a single facility, 60169 Cargo Terminal, before an ill-fated attempt to reach new markets in 10764 City Central Airport.



LEGO RAIL & TRANSIT SYSTEM (LRTS)

FIRST APPEARANCE: 9V TRAIN SETS, 1991

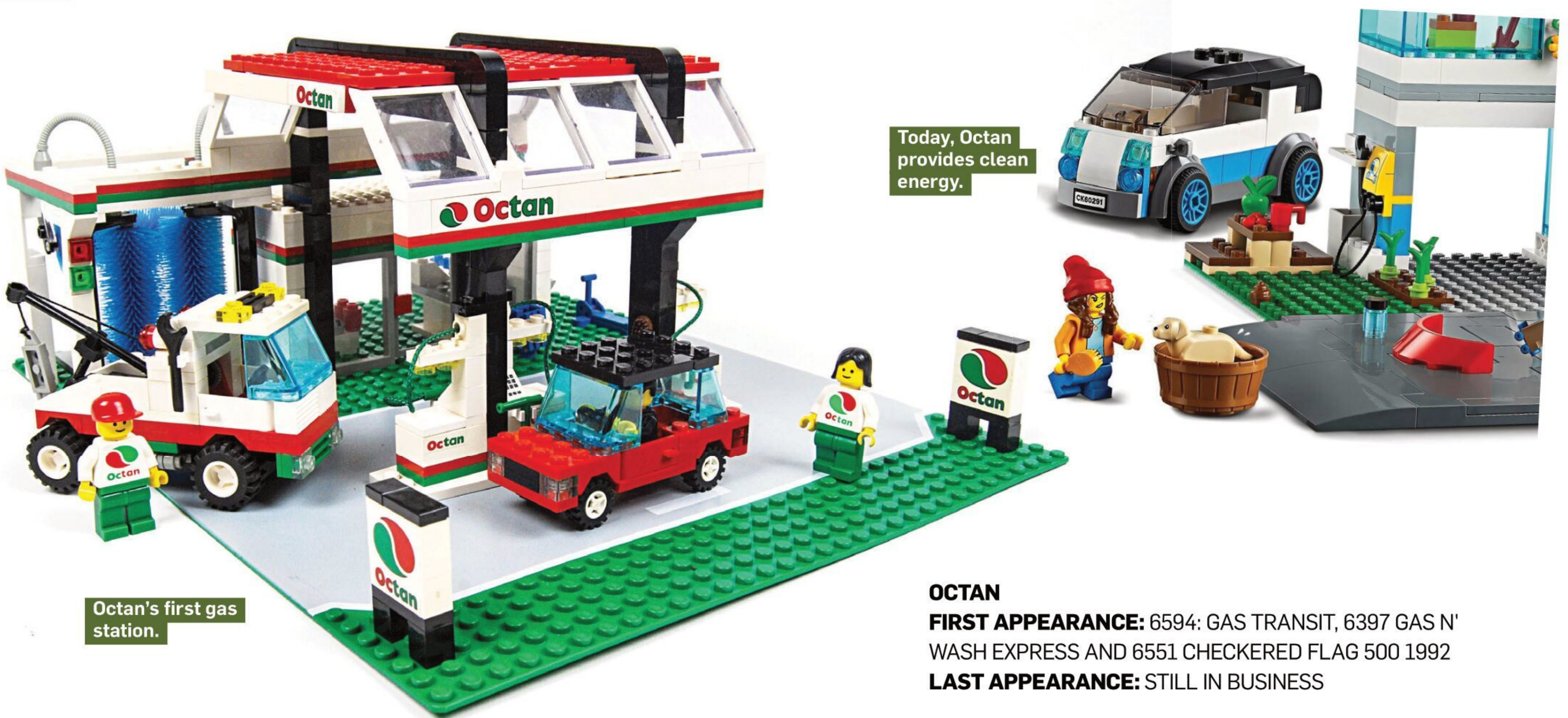
LAST APPEARANCE: STILL IN BUSINESS

There were LEGO train companies before LRTS – in fact, there are conspiracy theorists who claim that brick-built trains existed even before minifigures waddled around the first baseplates. However, no other railway company can hold a candle to LRTS when it comes to longevity.

The company exploded onto the scene in 1991 with solutions for freight (4563 Load N' Haul Railroad), transport (4558 Metroliner) and mountains (4551 Crocodile Locomotive), all based out of the railyard centred around 4554 Metro Station.

While it struggled in the late 1990s and early 2000s, LRTS rebuilt after near bankruptcy and has been continually upgrading its trains on a regular basis ever since. Some minifigures grumble that LRTS has a monopoly, but there has been no action to break the company up and a new generation of both freight and transport trains rolled onto the track as scheduled in 2022.





Octan's first gas station.

Today, Octan provides clean energy.

OCTAN

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6594: GAS TRANSIT, 6397 GAS N' WASH EXPRESS AND 6551 CHECKERED FLAG 500 1992

LAST APPEARANCE: STILL IN BUSINESS

LRTS may be slightly older, but the LEGO world's most well-known company is, without a doubt, Octan. Started as a petrol company whose cornerstone was a lovely filling station, 6397 Gas N' Wash Express, Octan has since expanded to every possible corner of the energy business.

Since 1992 Octan has operated an unbroken string of gas stations, sponsored numerous racing teams, partnered with LRTS for fuel transport, cleaned vehicles in various car washes, run fuel operations for marinas and airports, cashed in on nostalgia with retro facilities and even made a play for world domination under an aggressive CEO named Lord Business.

The same conspiracy theorists who think LRTS is a monopoly are pretty sure that Octan is responsible for almost everything in the LEGO world, including voting machines and all history books...

MOUNTAIN ATHLETICS

FIRST APPEARANCE: 60202 PEOPLE PACK – OUTDOOR ADVENTURES, 2018

LAST APPEARANCE: STILL IN BUSINESS

Mountain Athletics began as a sportswear company specialising in tank tops for climbers back in 2018. A reputation for quality allowed the brand to quickly expand into all corners of the athletic wear market, from rugby to high end racing apparel. Recently, it has been expanding beyond clothes into the bicycle and stunt racing market, most notably opening a store along 60306 Shopping Street.

The first Mountain Athletics product was a climbing tank top.



Mountain Athletics recently opened up a bike shop.

Wave wetsuits are popular with recreational divers.



Wave was put on the map thanks to Surfer Girl.

WETSUITS BY WAVE

FIRST APPEARANCE: 8804 COLLECTIBLE MINIFIGURES, 2011

LAST APPEARANCE: 40344 SUMMER CELEBRATION AND 60221 DIVING YACHT, 2019

Started by a lone fashion designer out of their garage, Wetsuits by Wave got a big break in 2011 when world famous Surfer Girl wore one of the company's products in Collectible Minifigures Series 4. Catapulted into the spotlight, Wave quickly became the preferred supplier for minifigure divers the world over.

Wetsuits made by the company have shown up all over the place, most notably on nearly every diver needing rescue by LEGO Coastguard operations in the last decade. This has led many to speculate that amateurs who have no business diving are donning Wave wetsuits and heading out to sea before they are ready. Such negative press is likely why Wave appeared to quietly windup business activities in 2019.

ORANGE WRECKING AND HAULING

FIRST APPEARANCE: 7642 GARAGE AND 7638 TOW TRUCK, 2008

LAST APPEARANCE: 60017 FLATBED TRUCK, 2013

For five glorious years you couldn't drive anywhere in LEGO City without seeing one of Orange Wrecking and Hauling's distinctive vehicles. Operated out of their massive 7642 Garage, Orange was the go-to company for vehicle maintenance and transport large and small.

Considering there hadn't been formal wrecking and hauling services since Overpass folded in 1988, minifigures were delighted with Orange and that love made its demise even more surprising when operations were scaled back to the single 60017 Flatbed Truck in 2013. Since then, minifigures have had to rely on a loose conglomerate of individual operators and one-shot businesses.



Orange ceased service soon after purchasing this final truck.

At its peak, Orange operated a huge garage.



CITY ELECTRICAL SERVICE (CES)

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6671 UTILITY REPAIR LIFT, 1989

LAST APPEARANCE: STILL IN BUSINESS

City Electrical Service is one of the lesser-known LEGO companies, but it has been reliably maintaining electrical infrastructure since beginning operations in 1989 with 6671 Utility Repair Lift for reaching those high up transmission lines.

In the intervening years, eagle-eyed minifigures have been able to spot its distinctive lightning bolt arrow logo on vehicles weaving amongst utility poles such as 3179 Repair Truck. Most recently, CES has been keeping 60306 Shopping Street's lights on.

LRTS sometimes transports electrical reels for CES.



The most recent CES vehicle.



The first CES Utility Repair Lift.



BLUE SKY TV

FIRST APPEARANCE: 664 TV CREW, 1977

LAST APPEARANCE: 60097 CITY SQUARE, 2015

Blue Sky TV may not be the most well-known LEGO company, but it is by far the oldest. Before minifigures evolved into their final form, their ancestors existed as much less articulated Salt Pillars. Even though they lacked eyes or faces, they loved TV and Blue Sky arose in 1977 to serve their needs.

Modernising in 1989 with 6661 TV Van and then again in 1997 with 6553 Crisis News, a company helicopter was last seen flying over 60097 City Square in 2015, before streaming killed off the business model.

6661 TV Van.



The company even owned a chopper.



The logo started off pretty basic.



BRICKOLINI'S PIZZA EMPIRE

FIRST APPEARANCE: 6350 PIZZA TO GO, 1994
LAST APPEARANCE: 60292 TOWN CENTRE, 2021

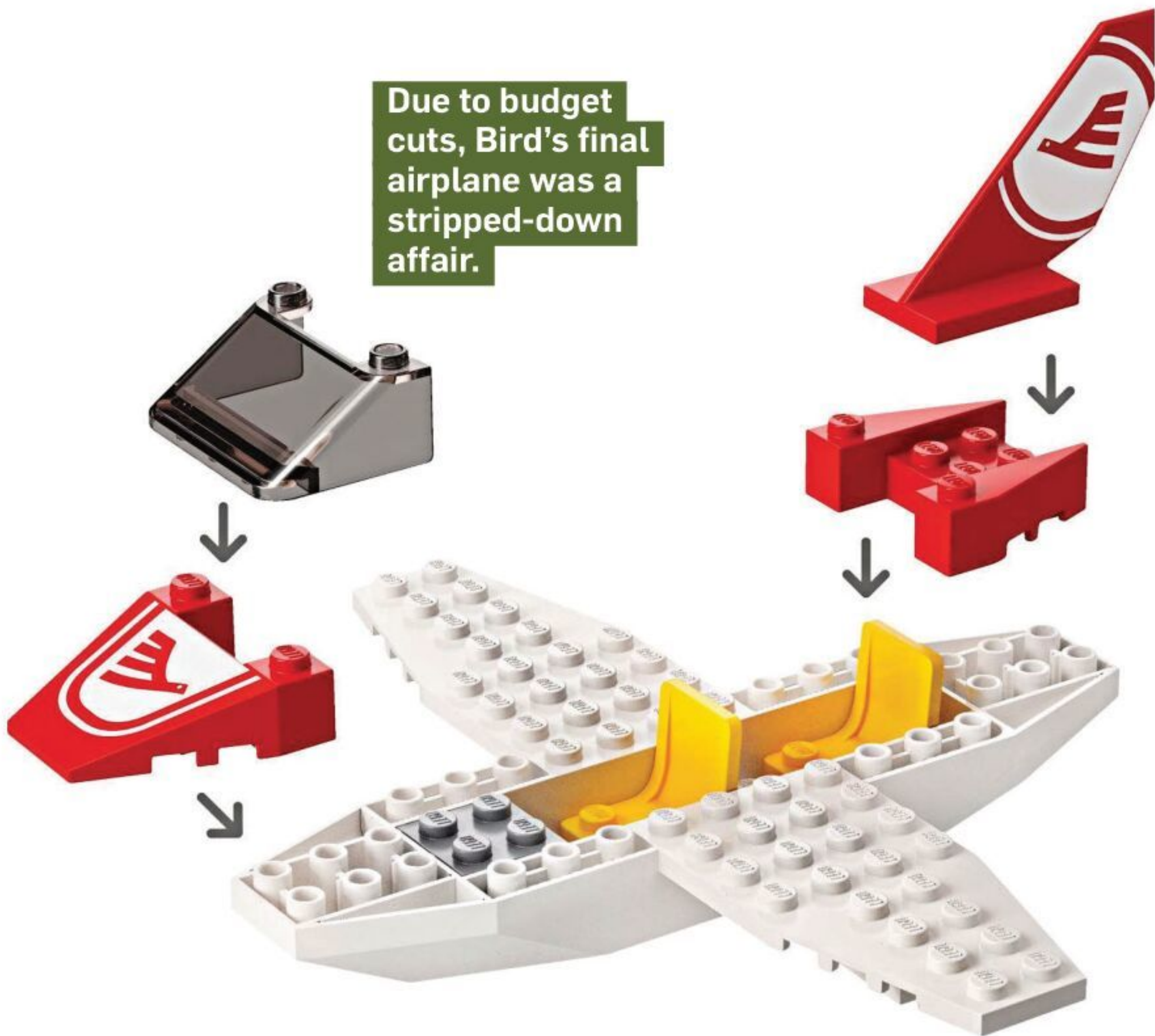
Founded by Mama and Papa Brickolini as the sole restaurant on LEGO Island, successive generations have expanded the company into a variety of different chains through the years.

First there was Pizza to Go, then City Corner Pizza and finally City Pizza, which proudly stood in the midst of 60026 Town Square. Smaller offshoots have also popped up in train stations and mini-doll malls over the decades. What has remained constant is that if a minifigure wants pizza, someone at Brickolini's is getting paid.



Brickolini's first pizza joint.

The name has varied through the years.



Due to budget cuts, Bird's final airplane was a stripped-down affair.

BIRD AIRLINES

FIRST APPEARANCE: 7894 AIRPORT AND 7893 PASSENGER PLANE, 2006
LAST APPEARANCE: 10764 CITY CENTRAL AIRPORT, 2018

Aeroline had a strong run as the sole air carrier within the LEGO universe, lasting until 2004. However, times changed and minifigures were demanding new options – specifically, bigger and roomier planes.

Bird Airlines rose to meet that demand with a fleet of enormous aircraft built around the new extra-large moulded hull parts. Beginning operations in 2006, its distinctive eagle insignia would grace the tails of aeroplanes large and small for over a decade. Bird operated out of several generations of City airports such as 60104 Airport Passenger Terminal before being supplanted by new entrant Toucan Air in 2020. ■



The Bird logo featured on the aircraft's tails.

MOD SQUAD INDIANA JONES BIPLANE

Recreate the aerial battle from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade using these instructions for building Indy's biplane

Words & Pics: Daniel Konstanski

77012 FIGHTER PLANE Chase is the second time that the LEGO Group has mined the iconic fighter plane scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade for inspiration. This most recent outing picks up after Indy and his father crash land and the chase continues along the road to Berlin, with the German fighter strafing their stolen car.

While a cool scene, the aerial dogfight that occurs moments before the crash is even more thrilling. Those moments were the focus of 7198

Fighter Plane Attack, which was released back in 2009. That older set included the iconic white biplane that Indy can fly (but not land).

Prices have increased in the last 14 years, so omitting a second plane allows 77012 to offer a nice small box... but having an updated biplane still feels essential for LEGO Indy's return. If you want to see chaos in the sky, build Indiana and Henry Jones their own flying vehicle using these instructions.

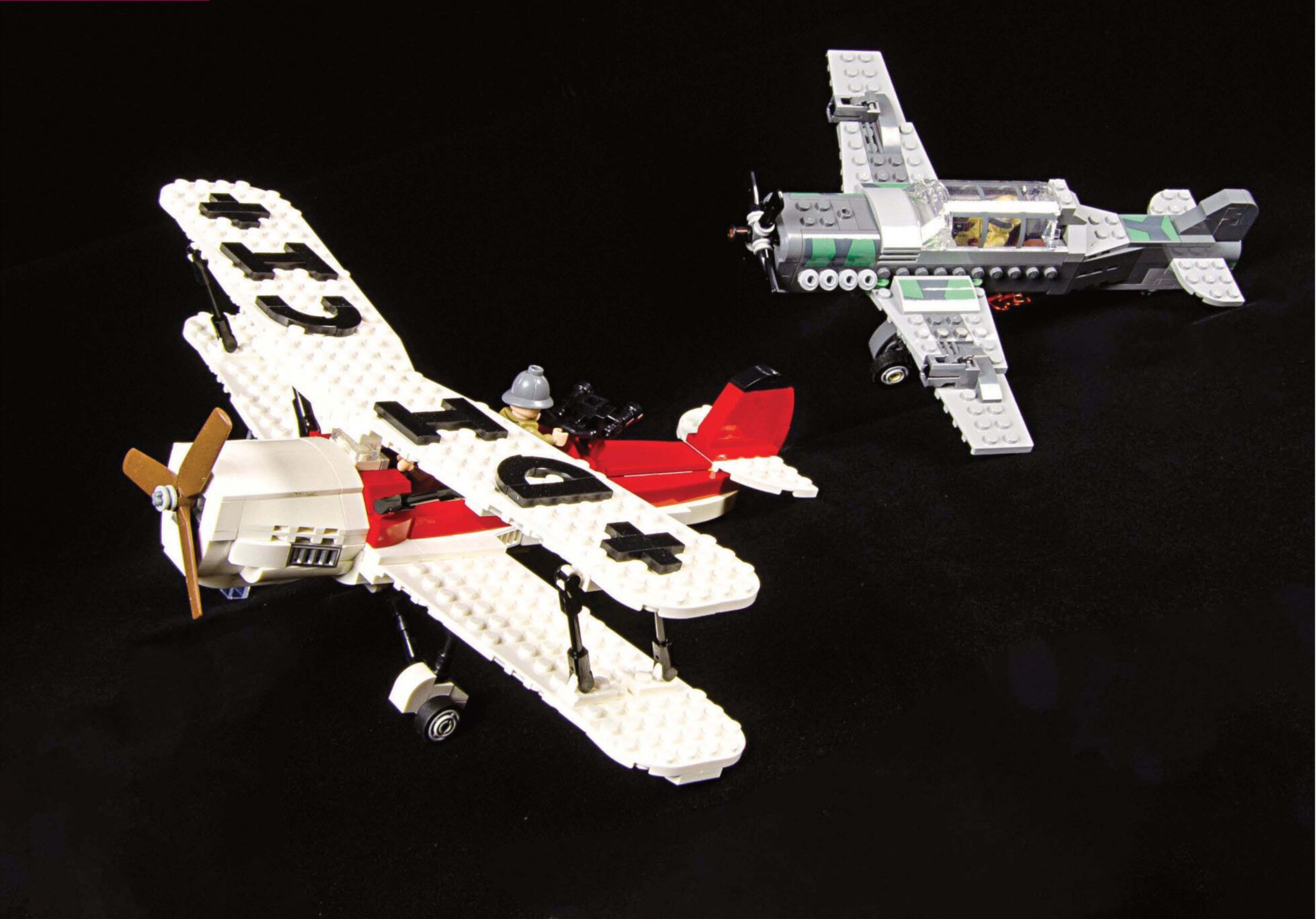


ORIGINAL



MOD

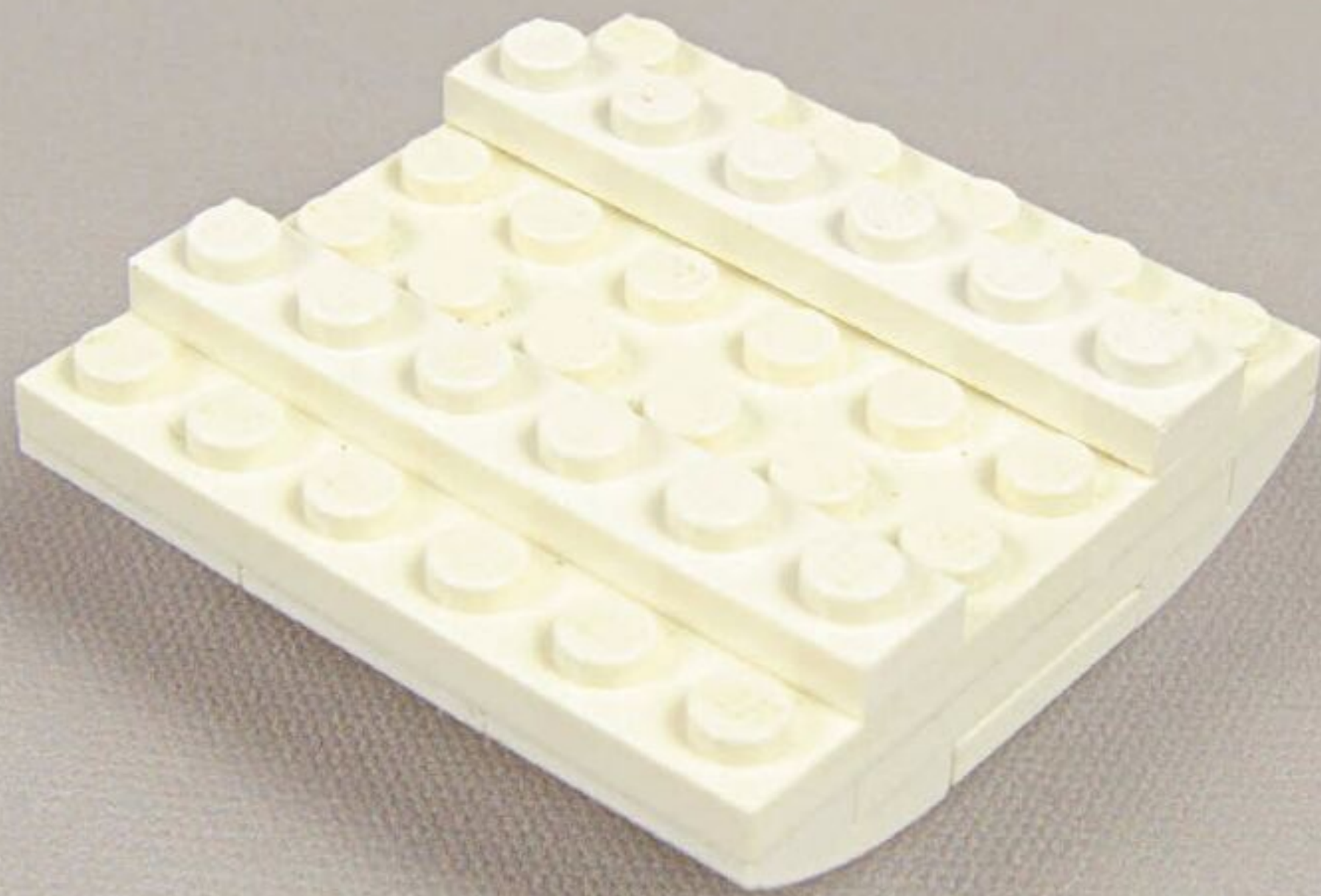
77012 needs a second plane.



This build delivers Indy's plane.

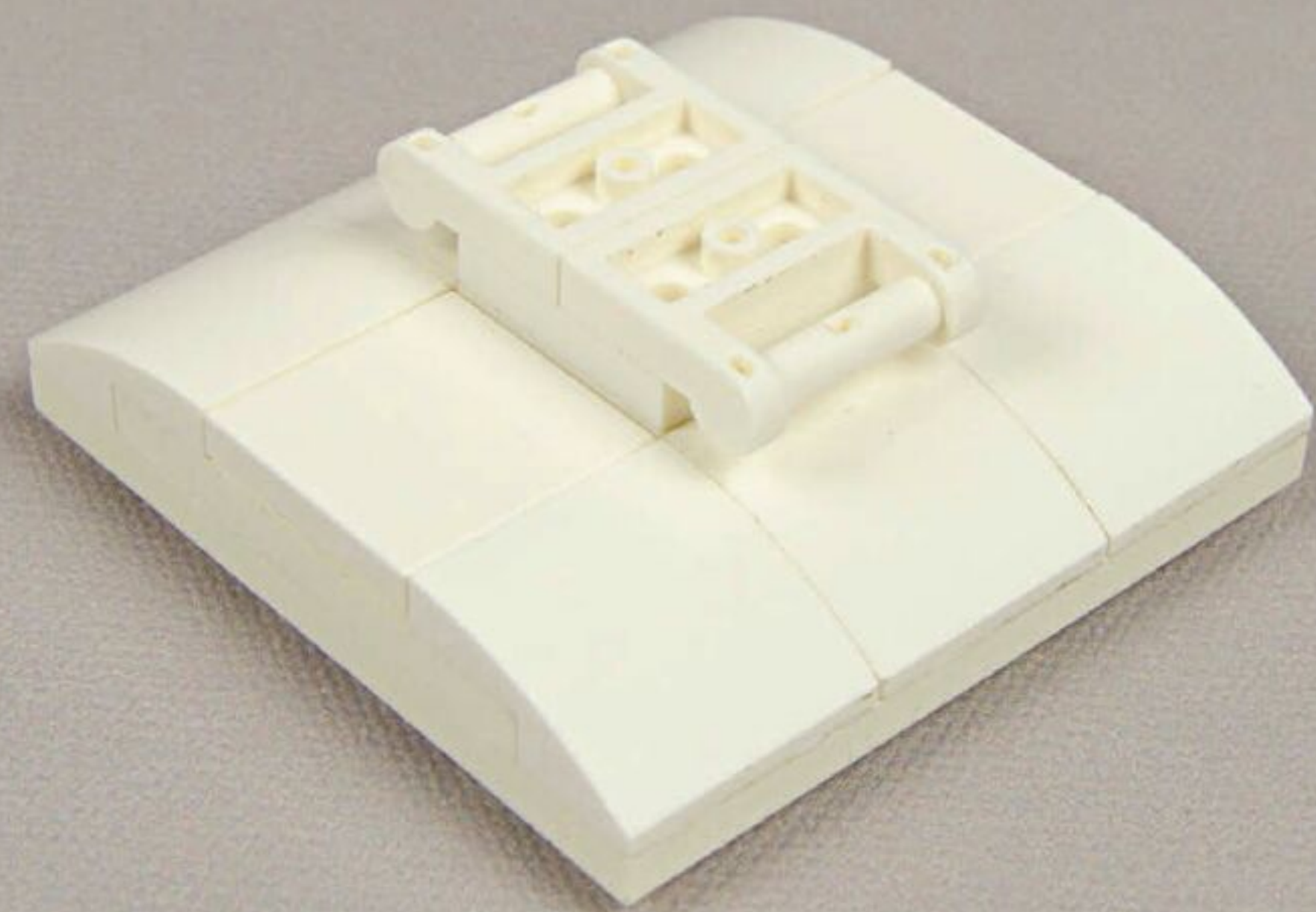


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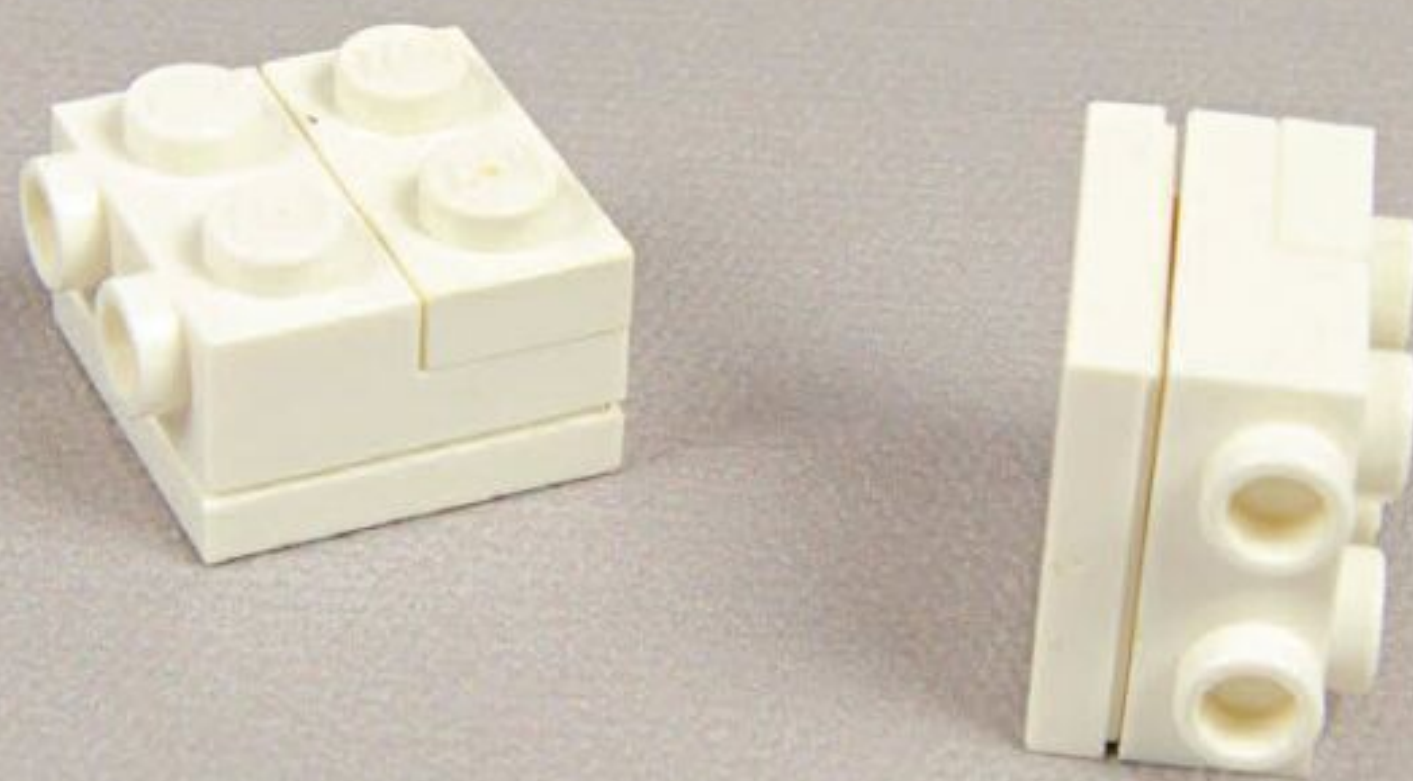
Begin with a 6x6 plate and two 1x6 plates.

2



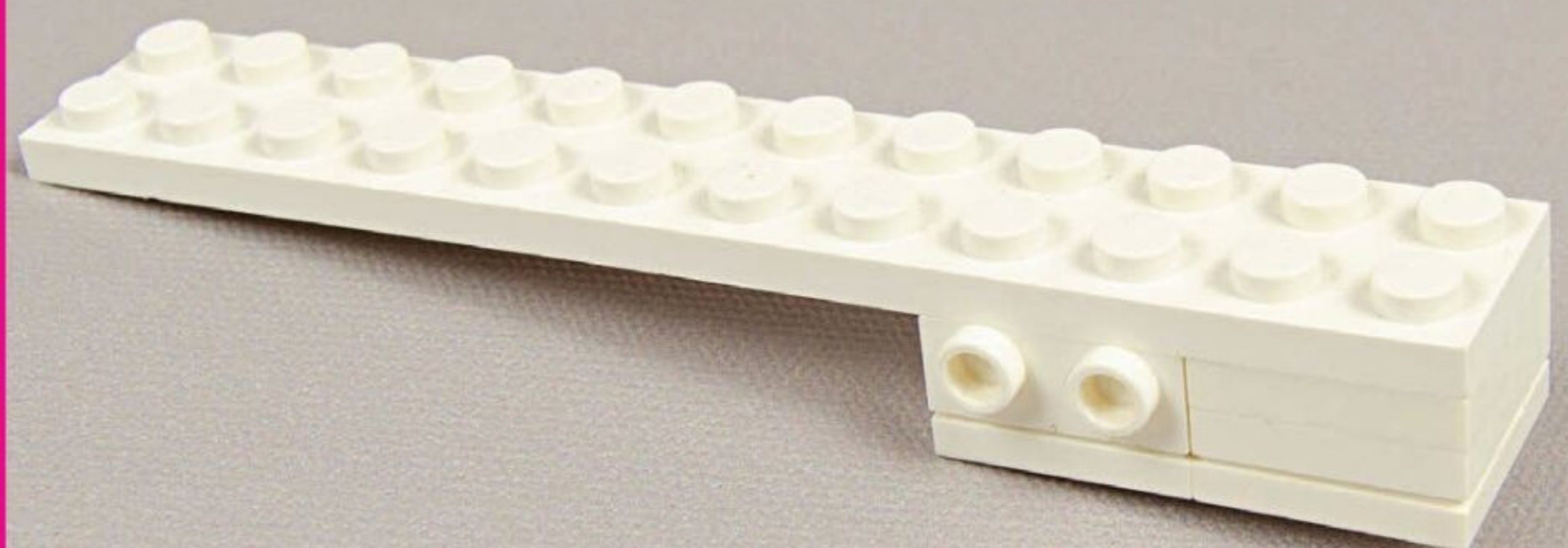
Build the reverse side as shown.

3



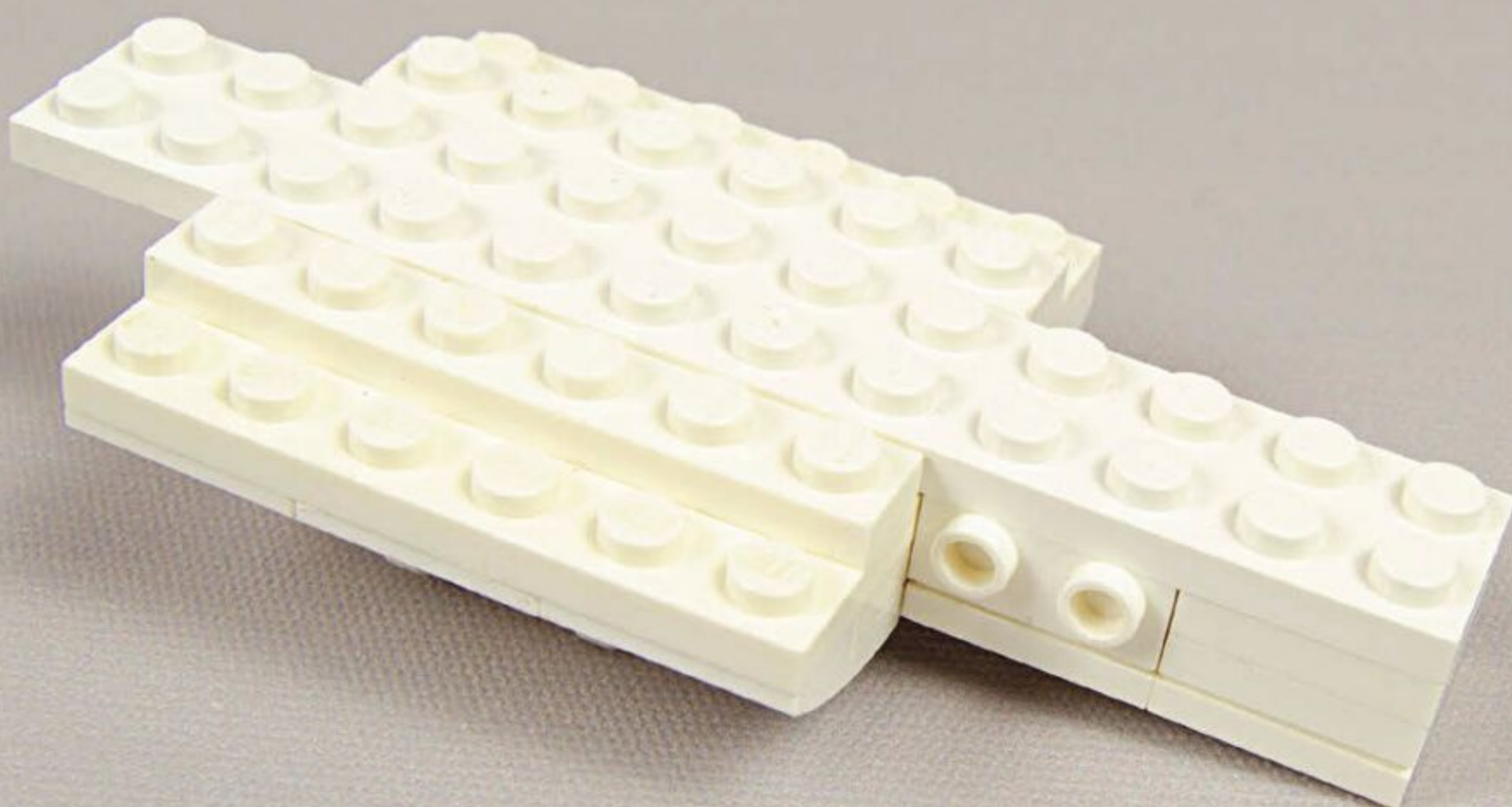
Build these matching brackets.

4



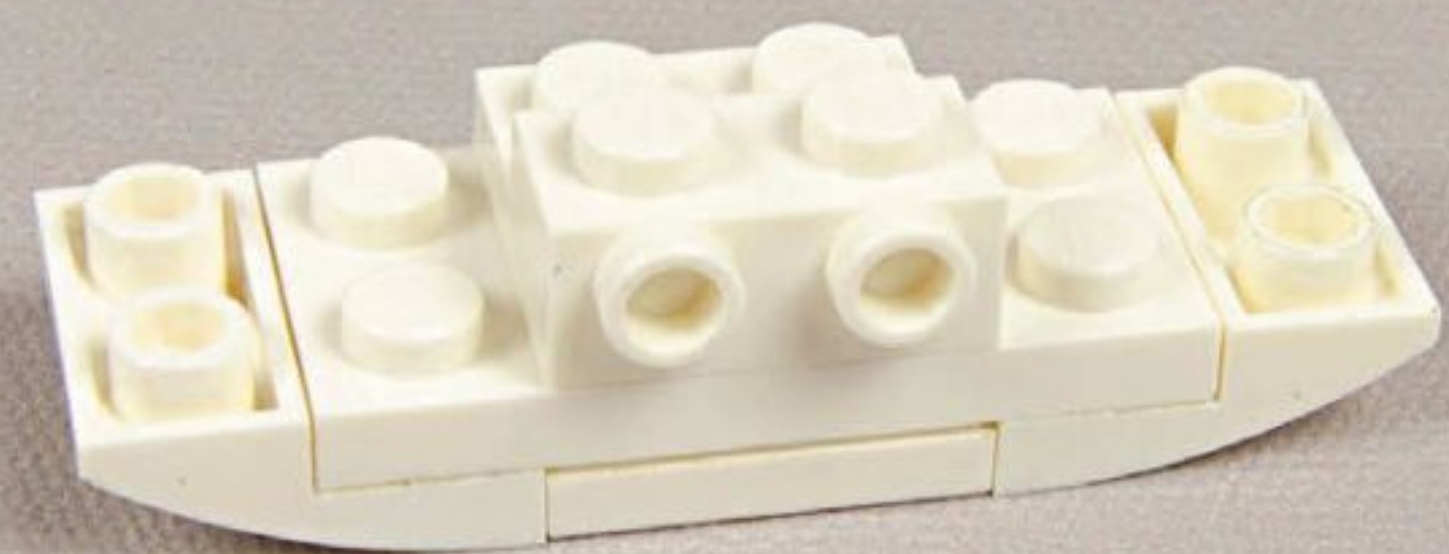
Attach the brackets pointing in opposite directions.

5



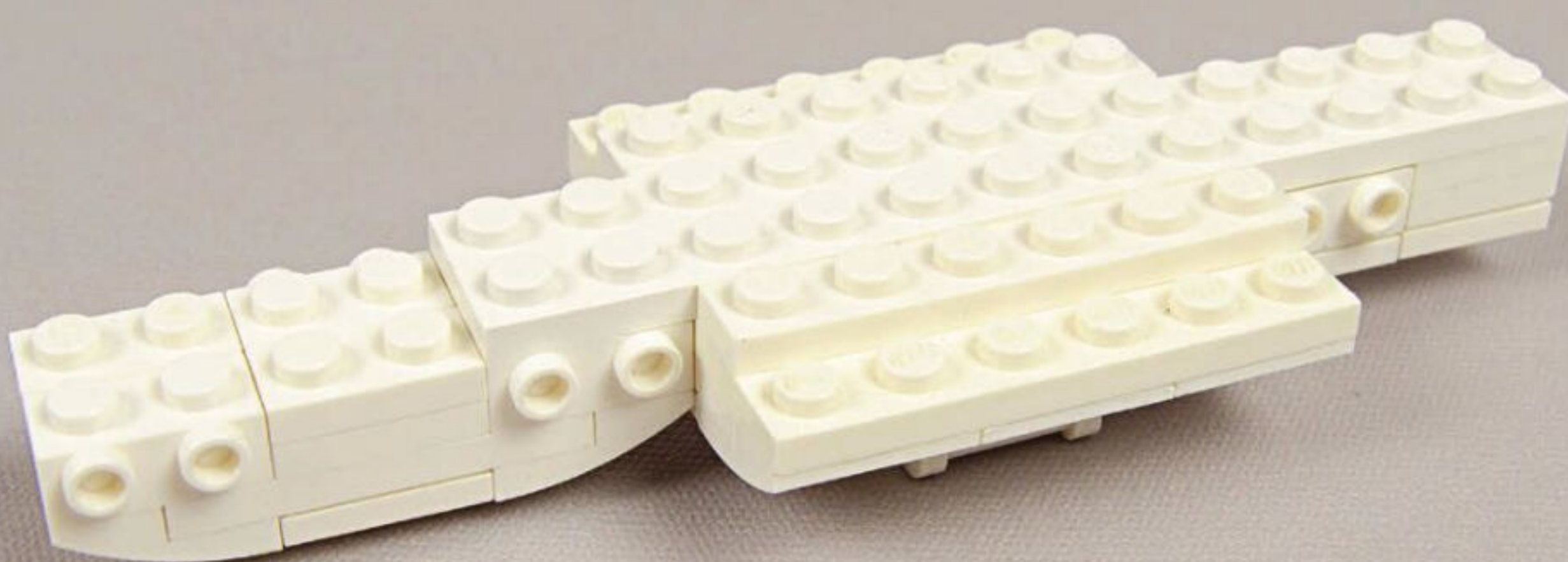
Join the two sections.

6



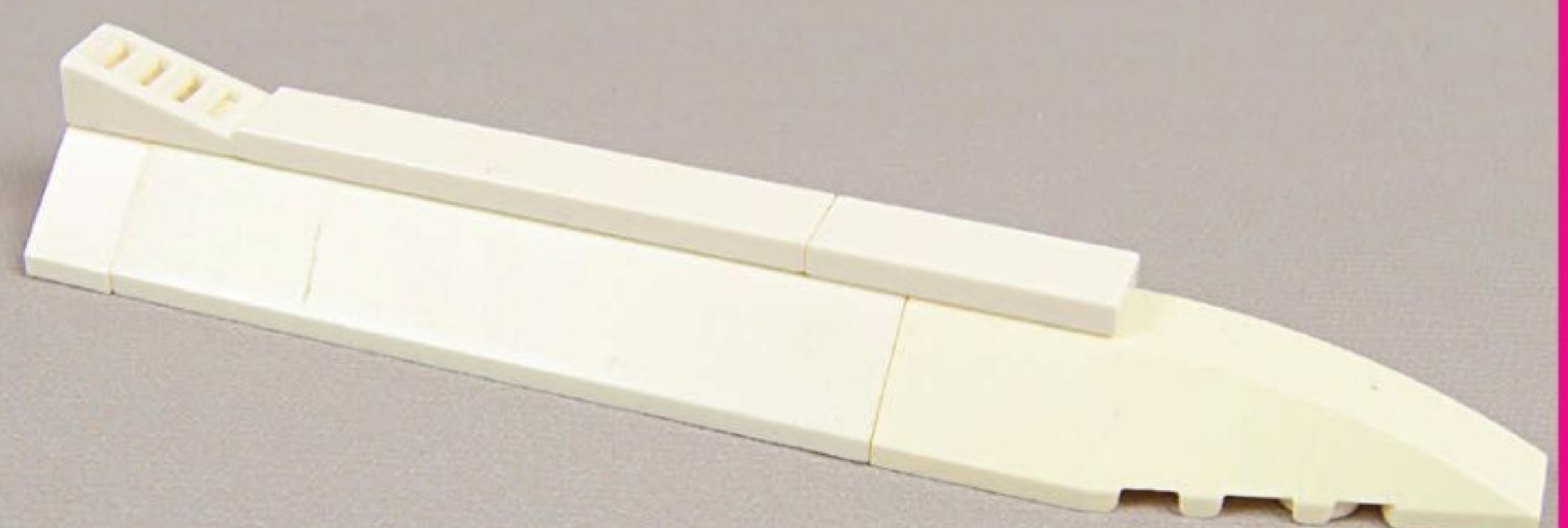
This will be the plane's front.

7



Attach to the rest.

8



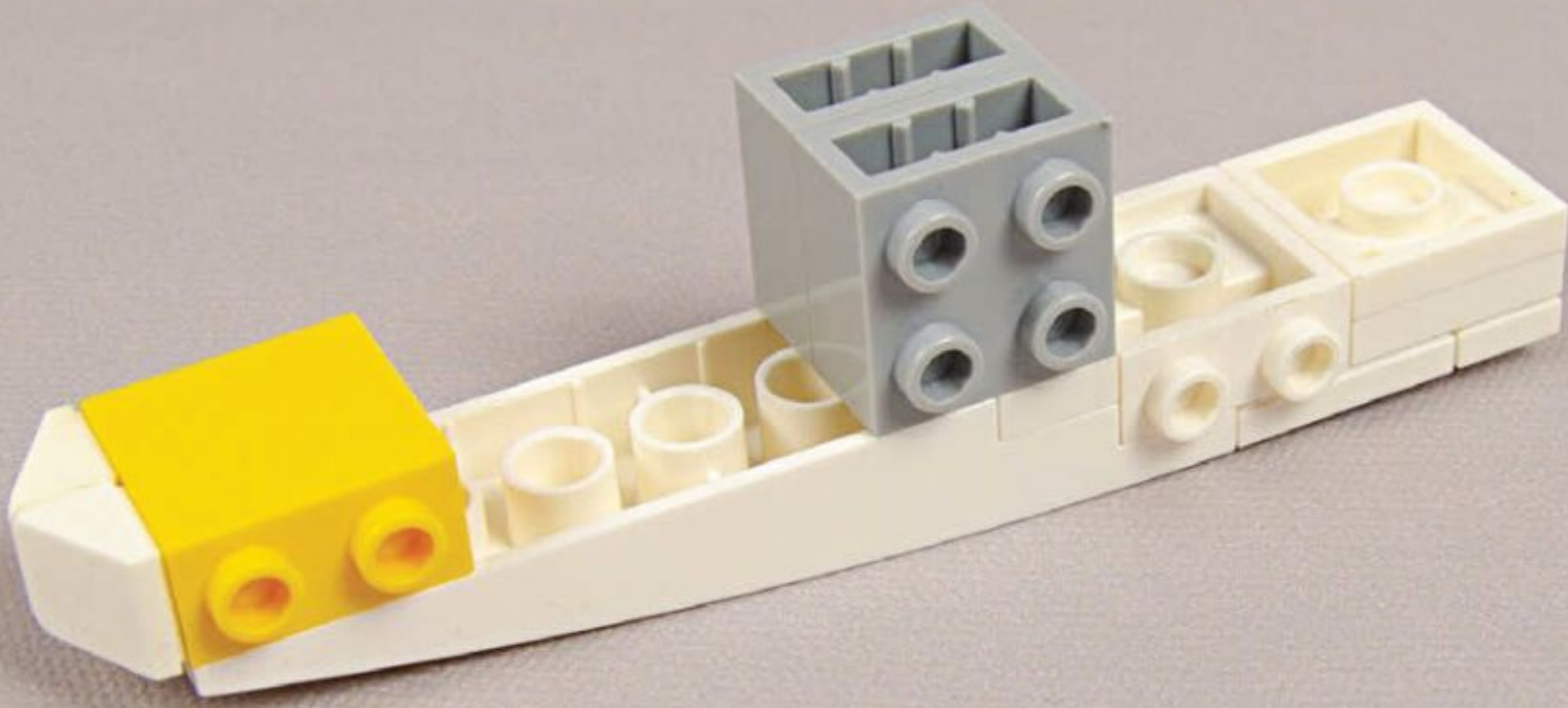
Build this, and a mirrored one.

9



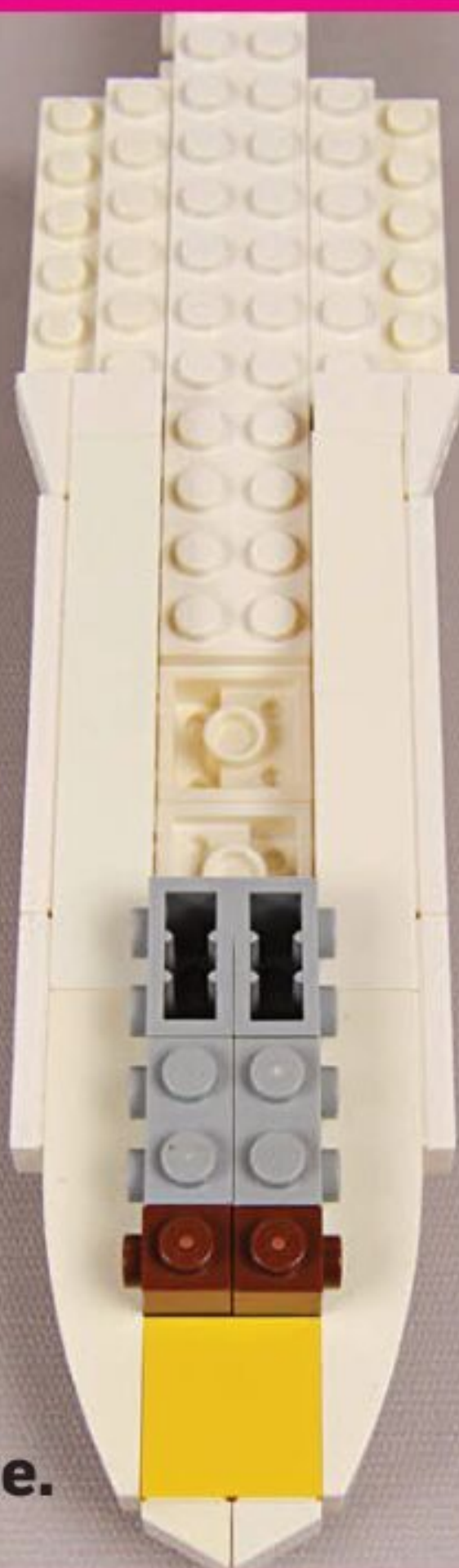
Attach bricks with studs on the side.

10



Continue as shown.

11



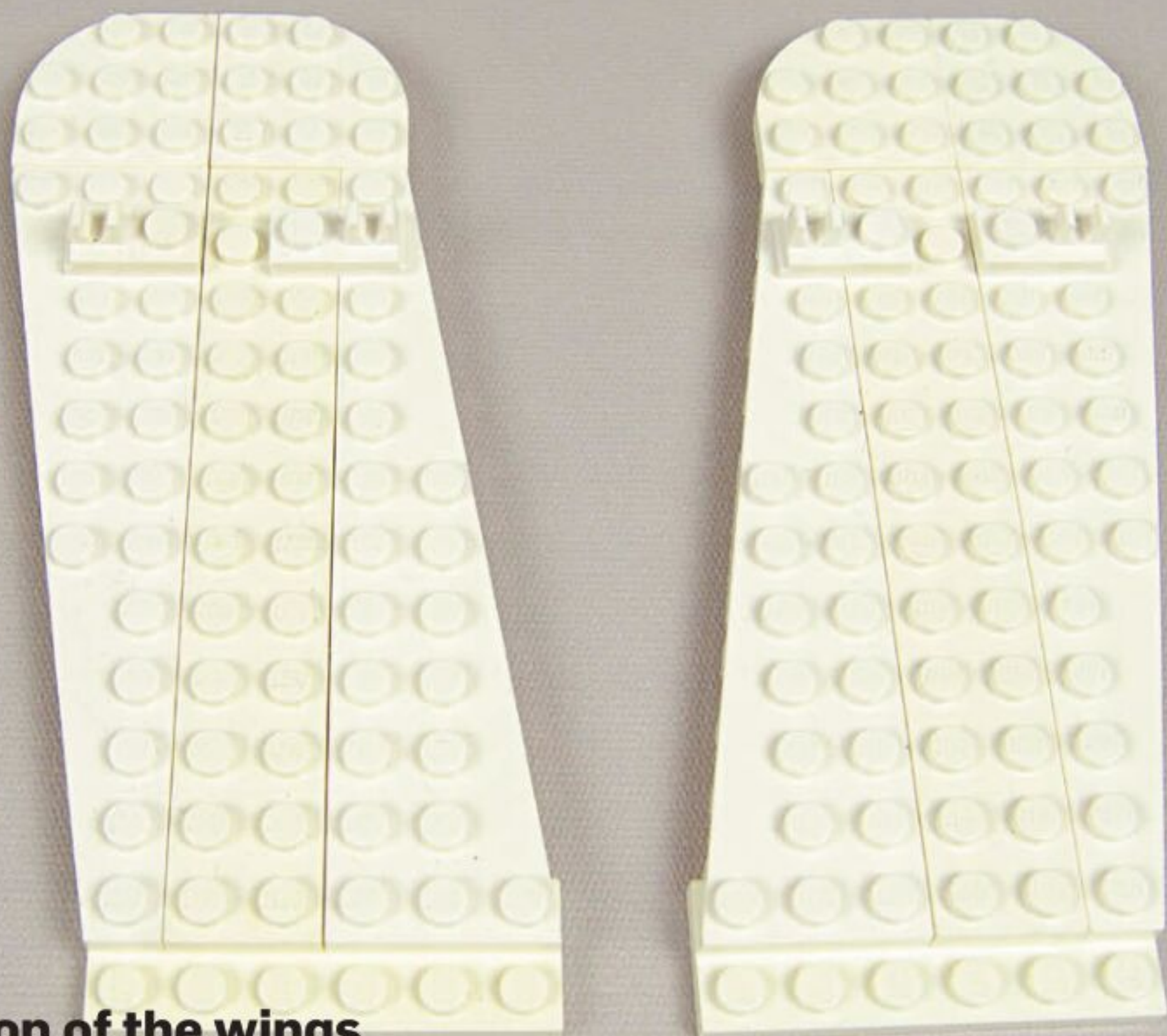
Form the rear of the biplane.

12



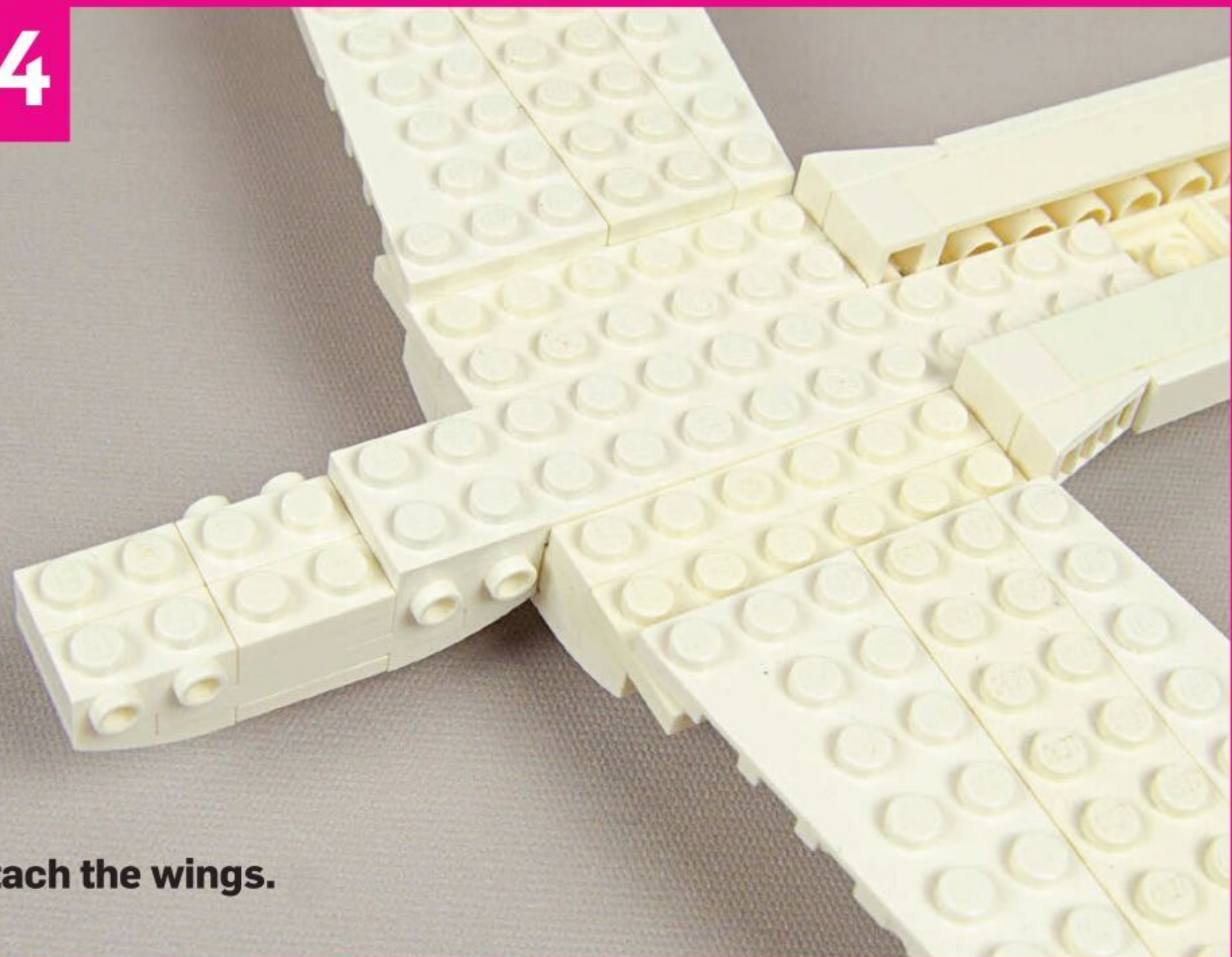
Build mirrored wings like these.

13



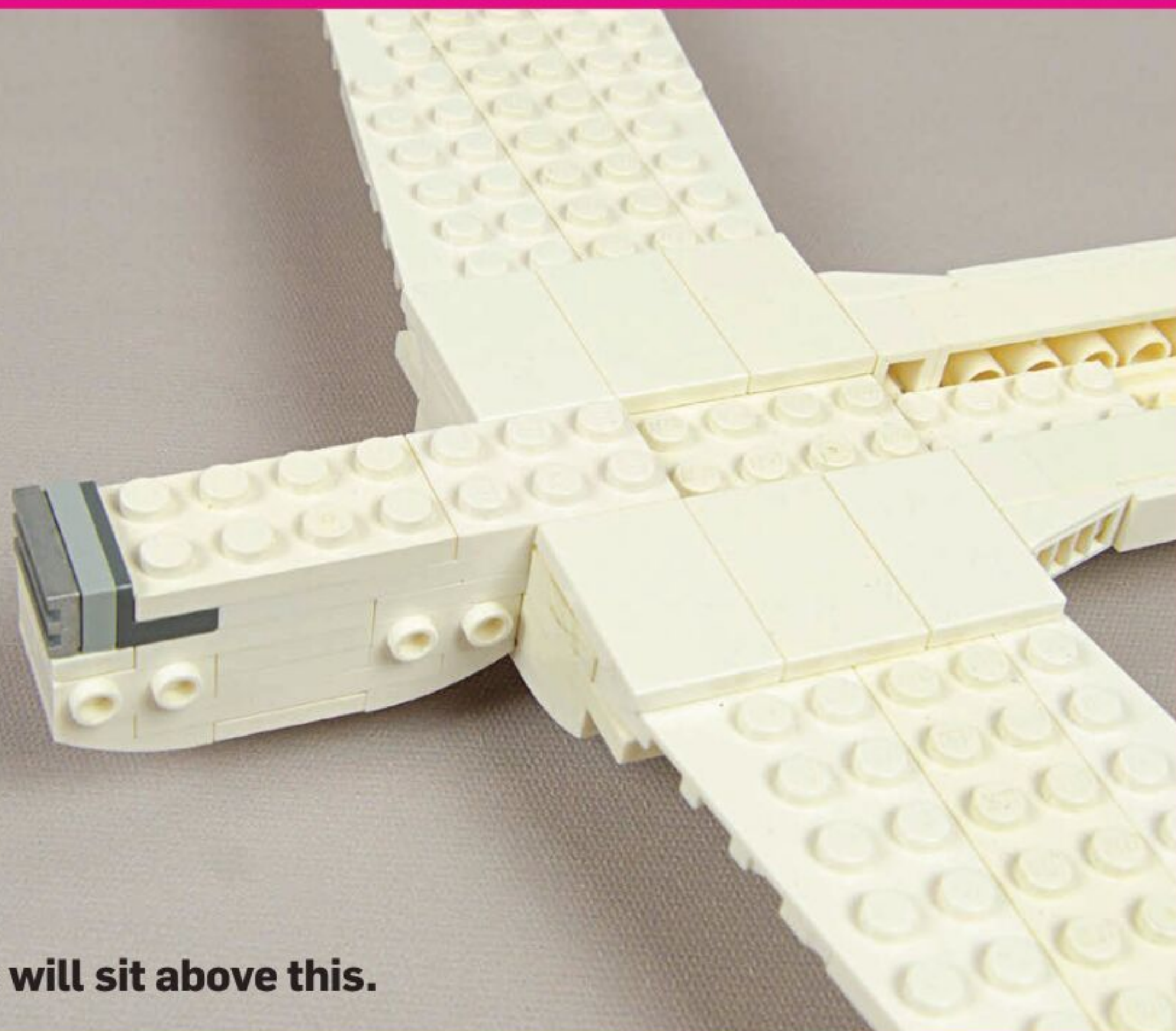
This is the top of the wings.

14



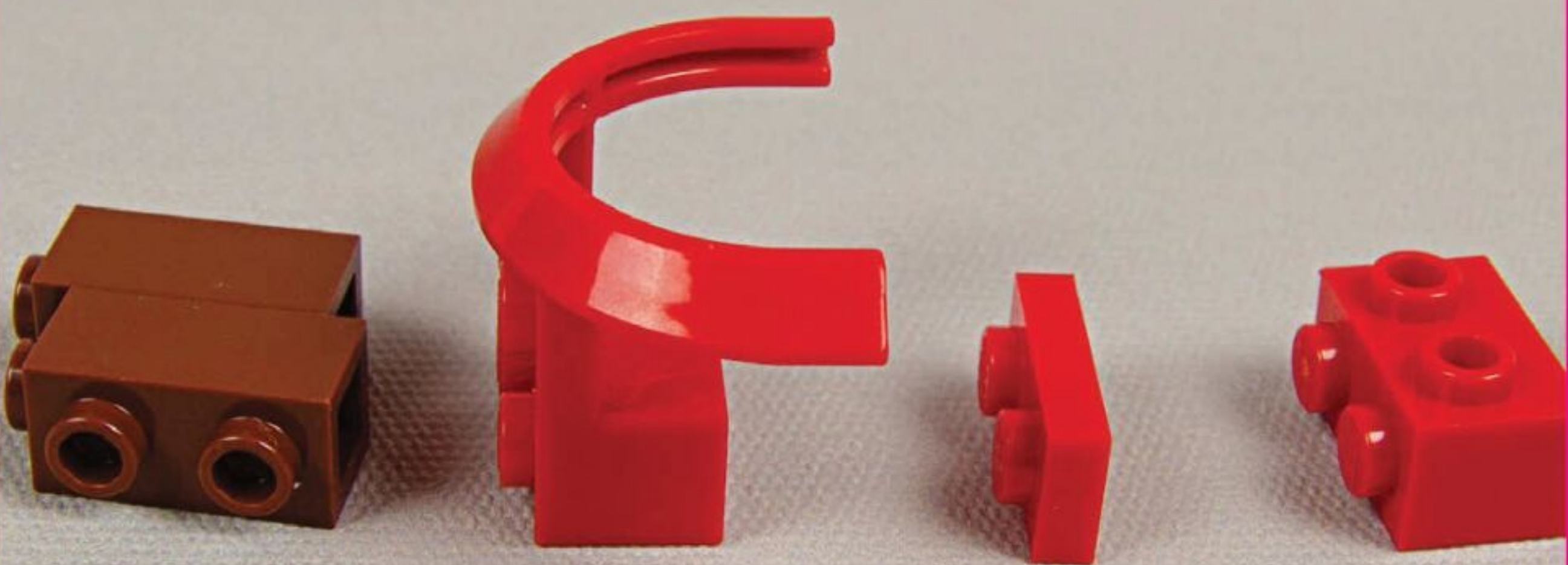
Attach the wings.

15



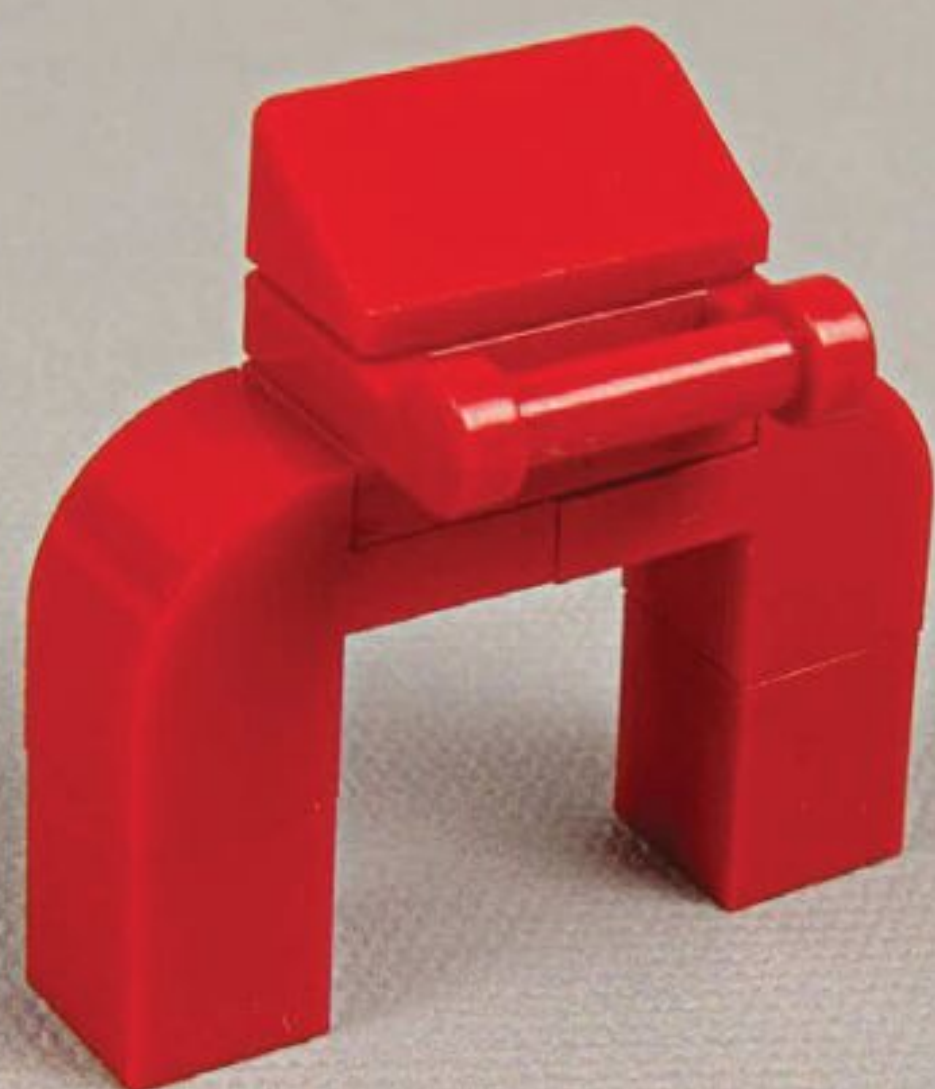
The engine will sit above this.

16



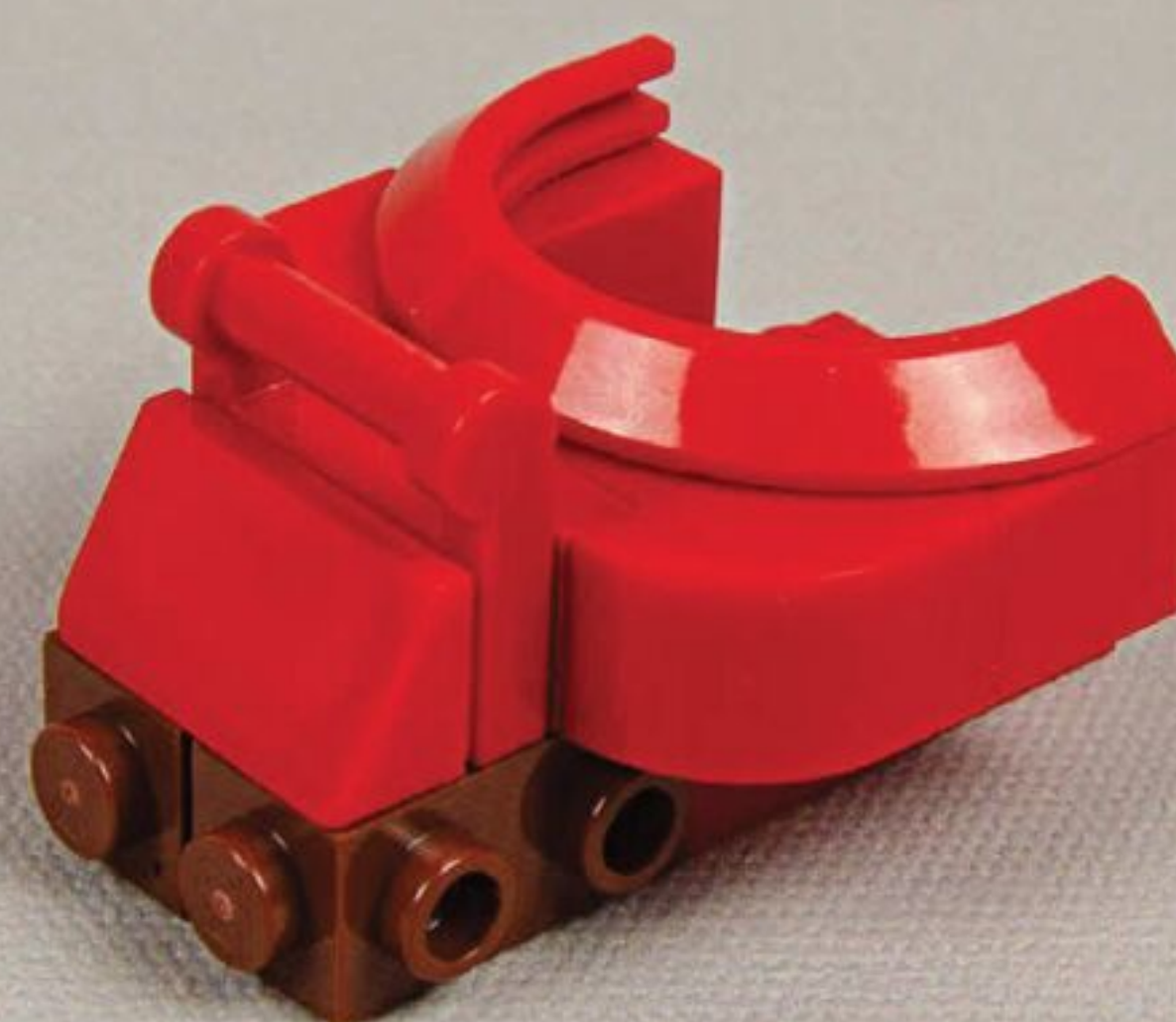
This will be part of the gunner's seat.

17



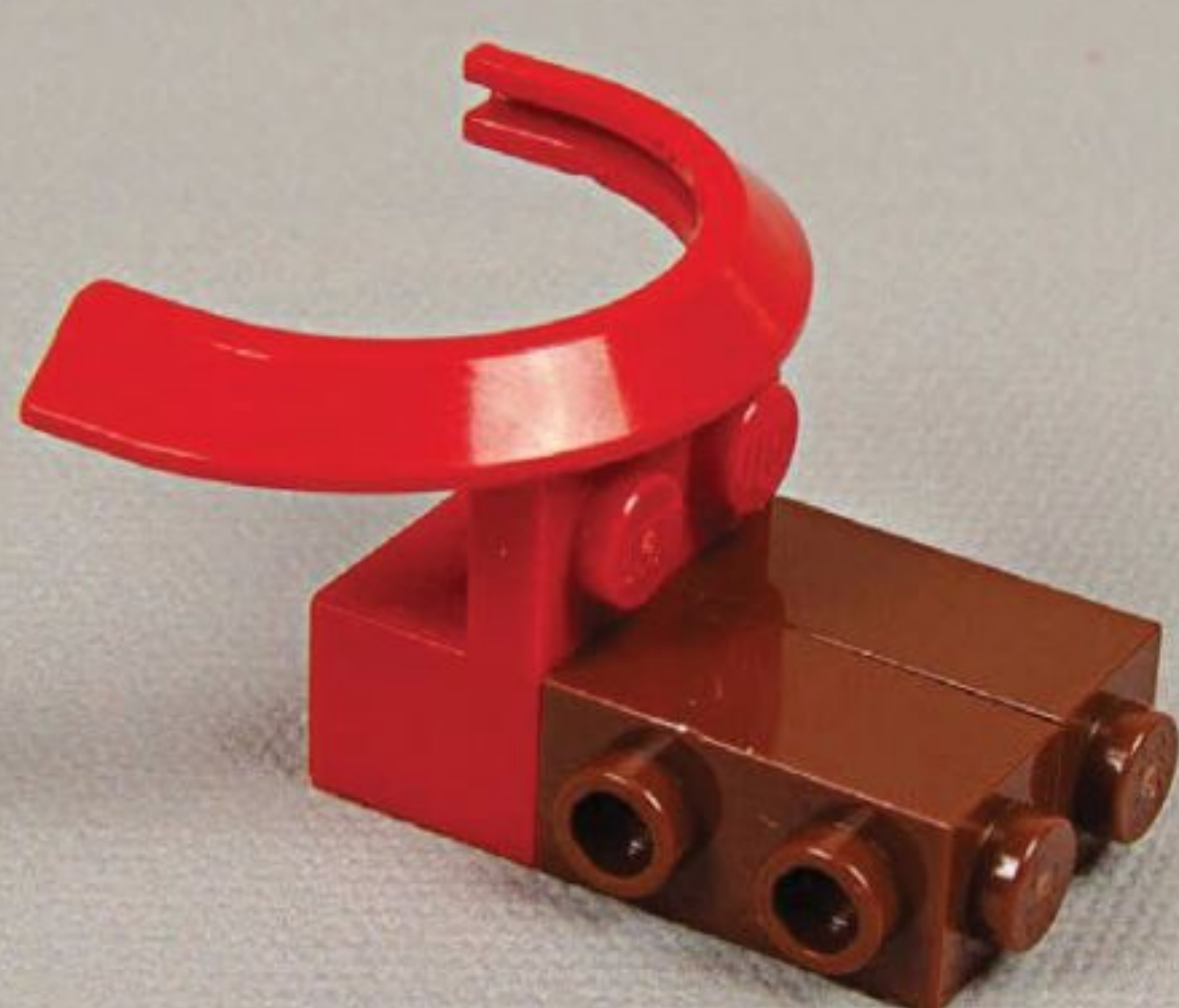
Use curved bricks for this part.

18



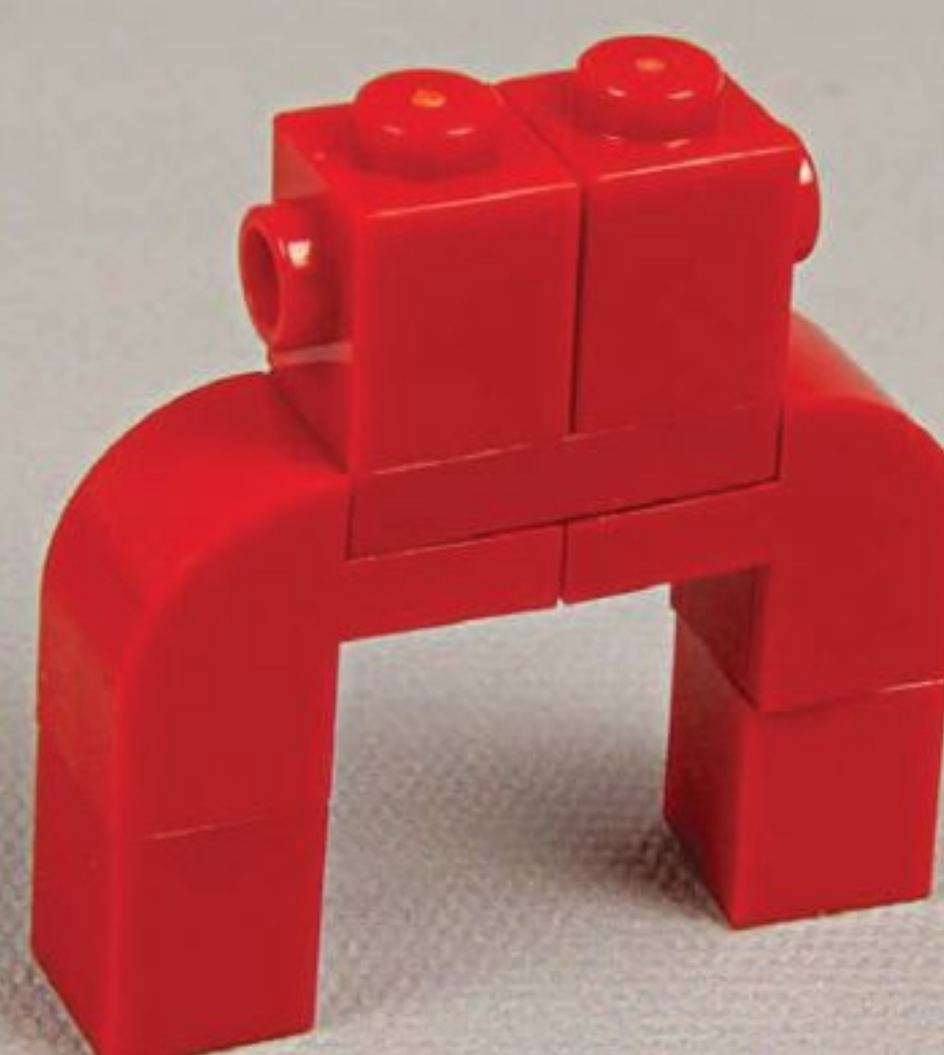
Join together and add a double cheese slope.

19



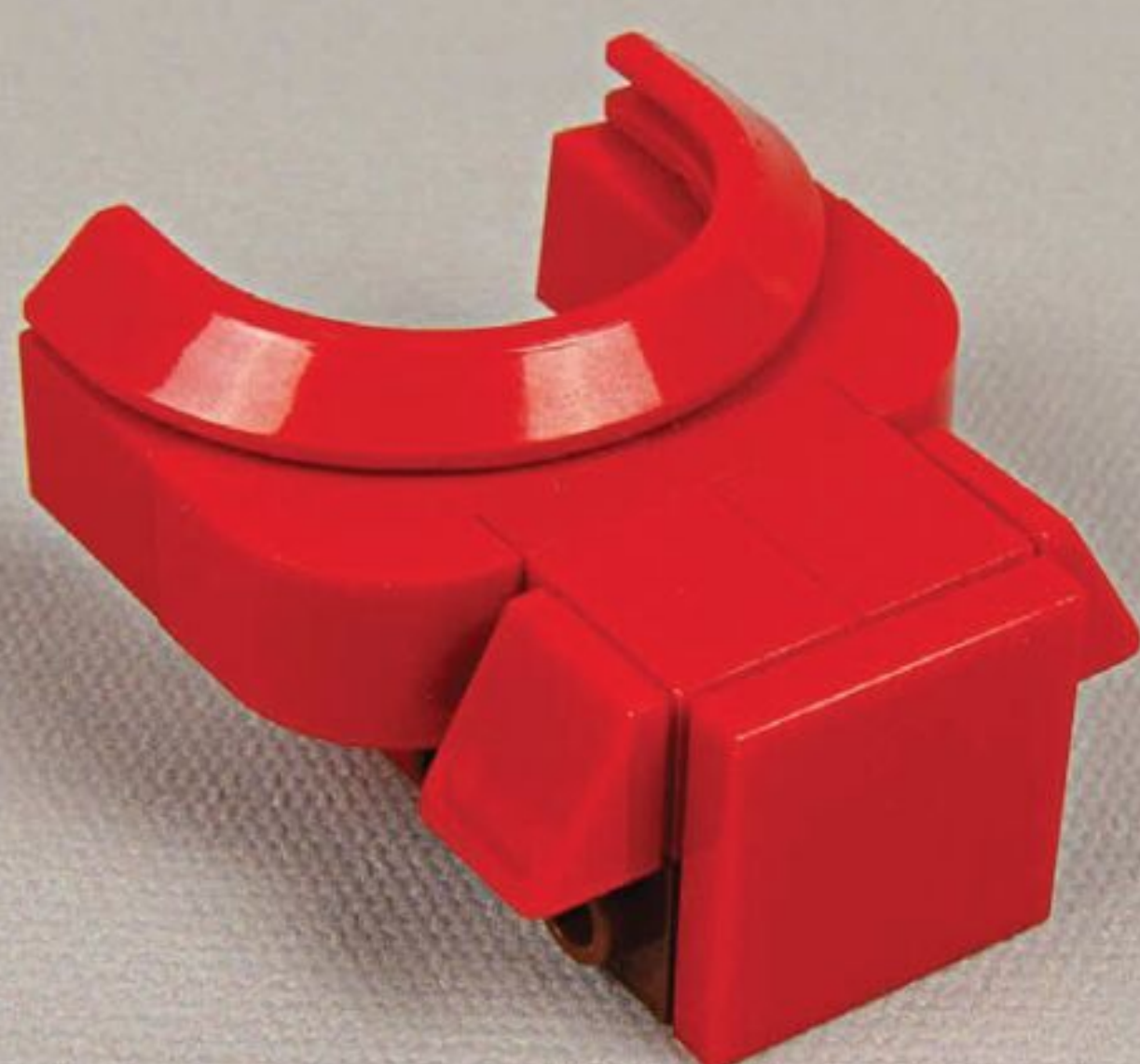
Start on the other side.

20



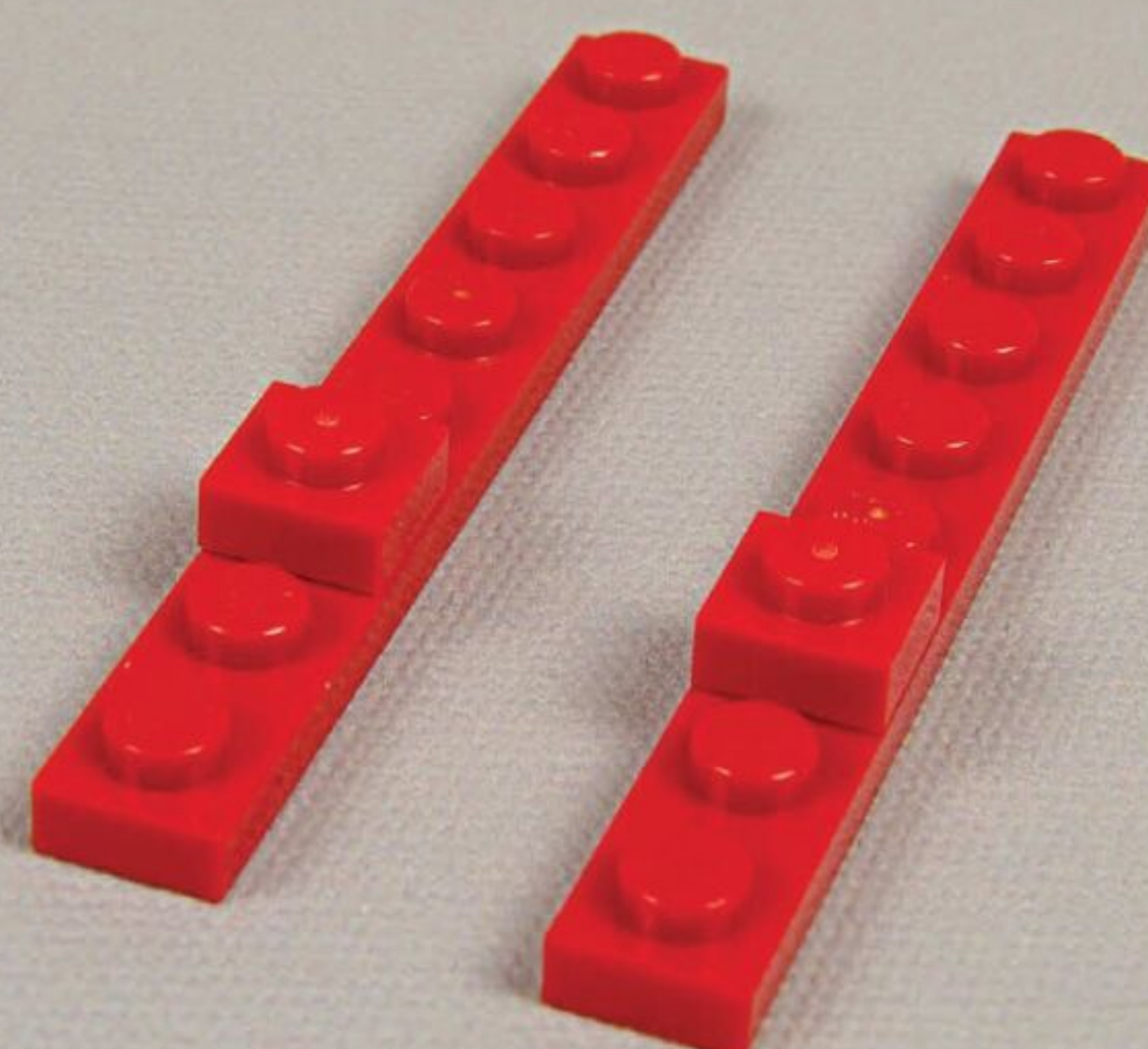
This will be joined to the wheel arch.

21



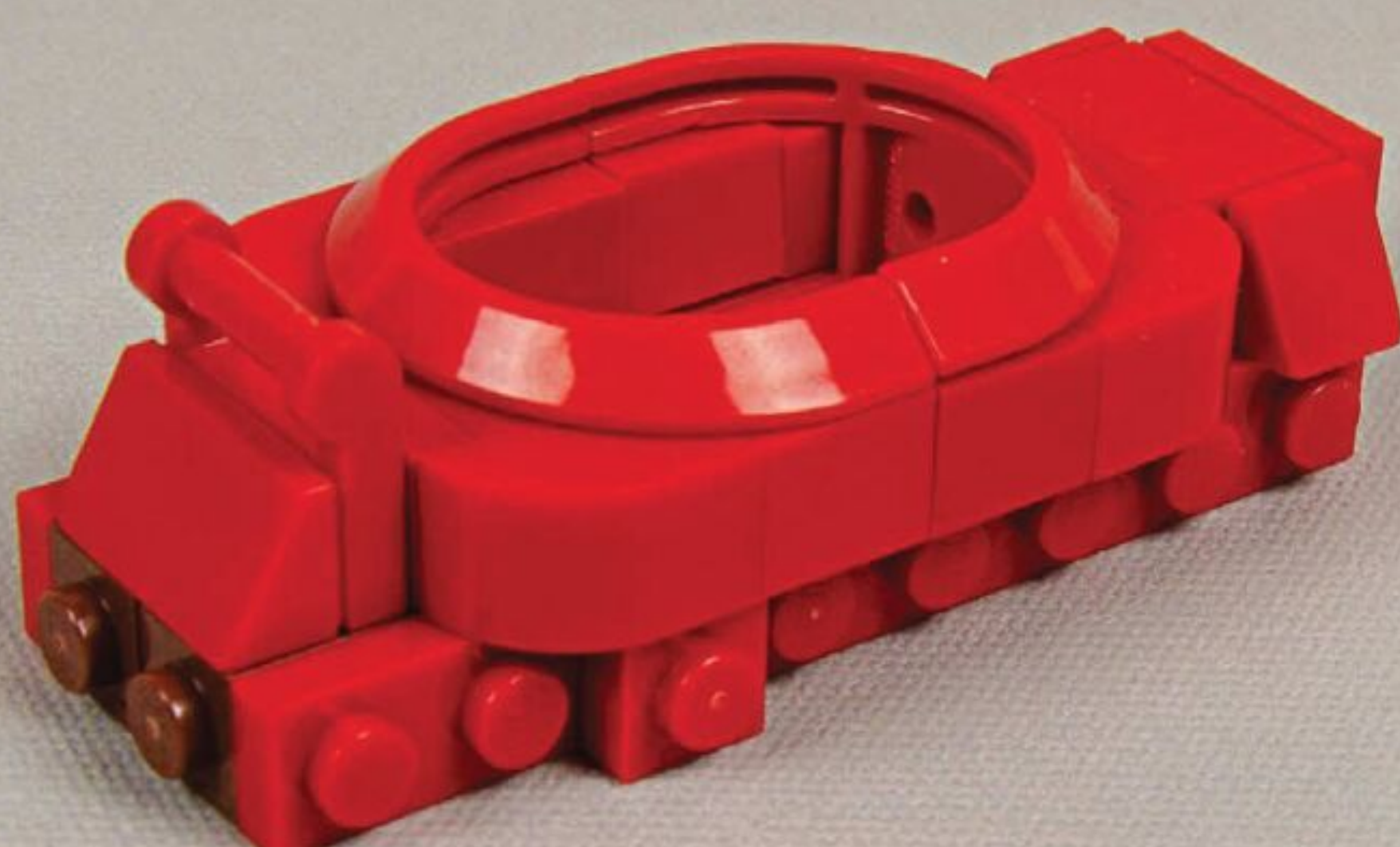
The other side of the gunner's seat.

22



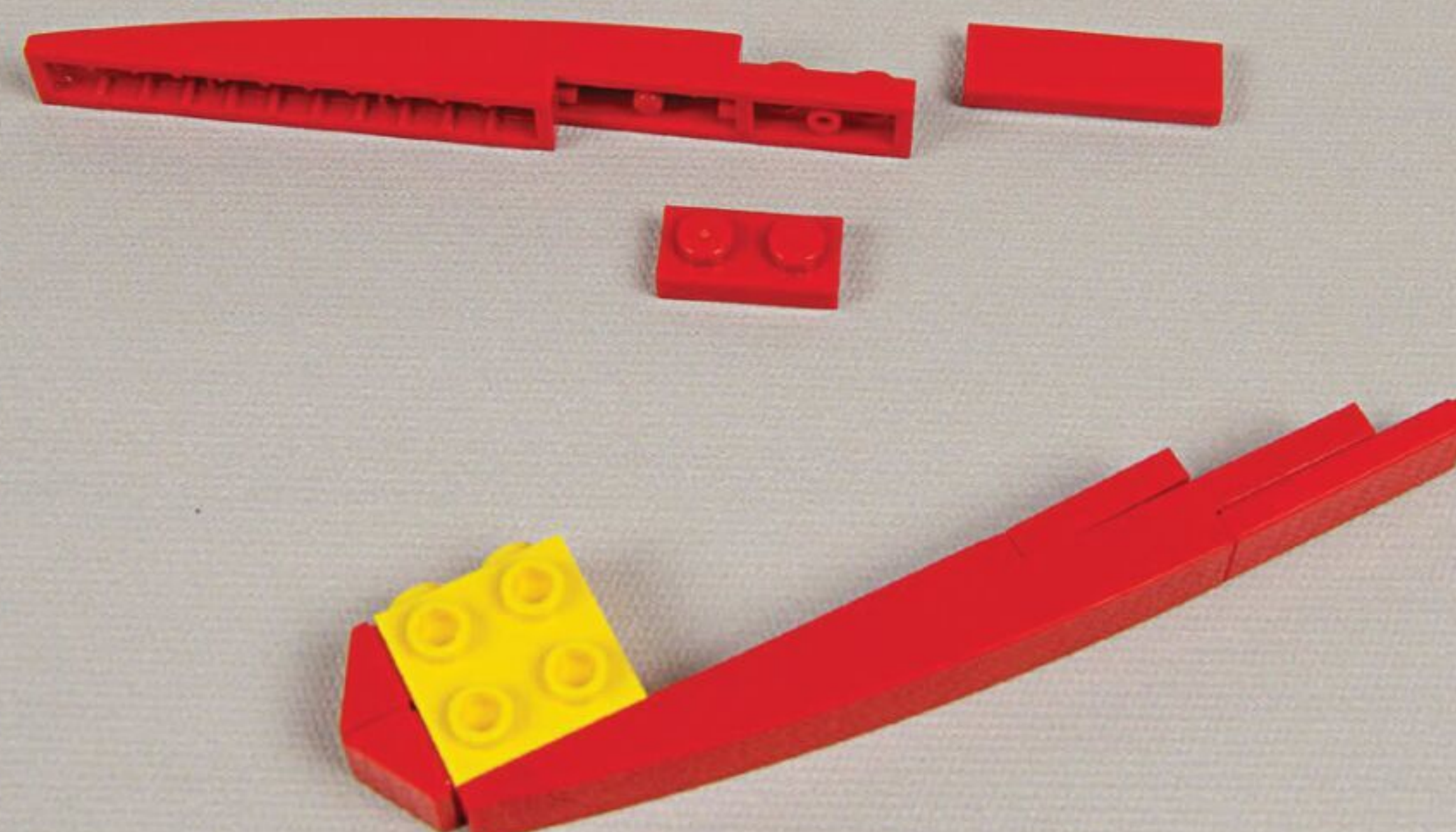
A pair of 1x8 and 1x1 plates.

23



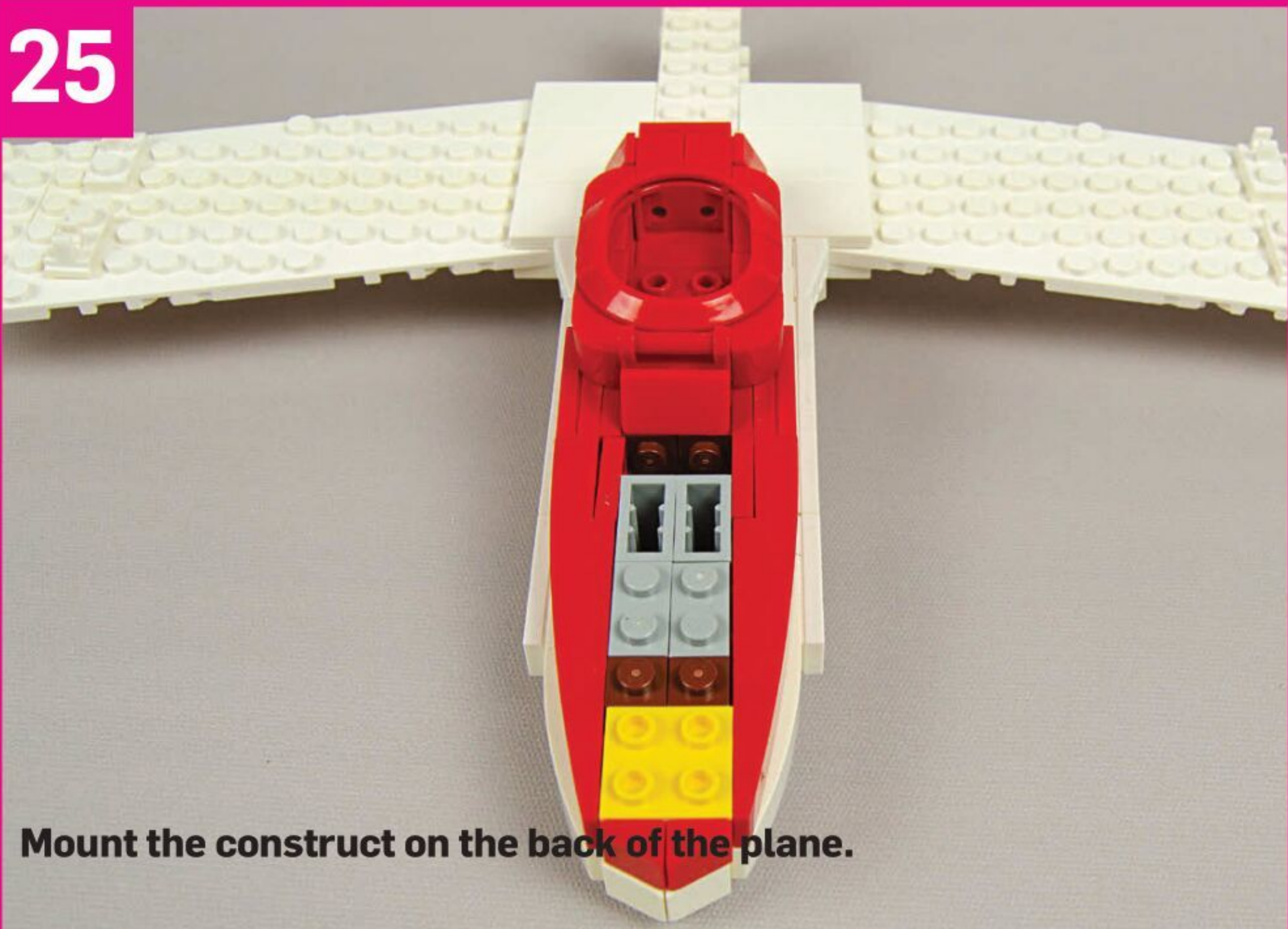
The completed gunner's seat.

24



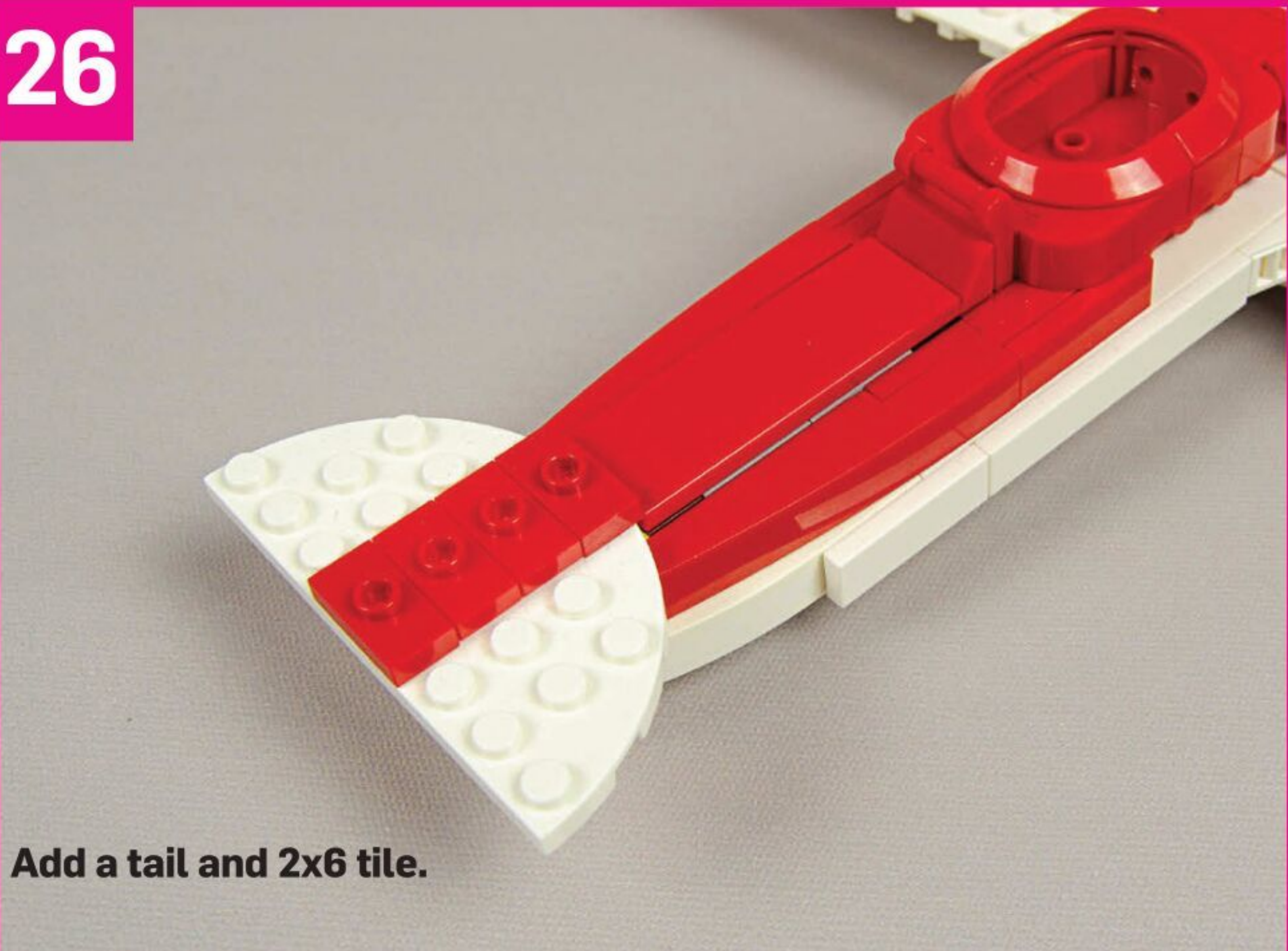
These will attach on either side of the gunner's seat.

25



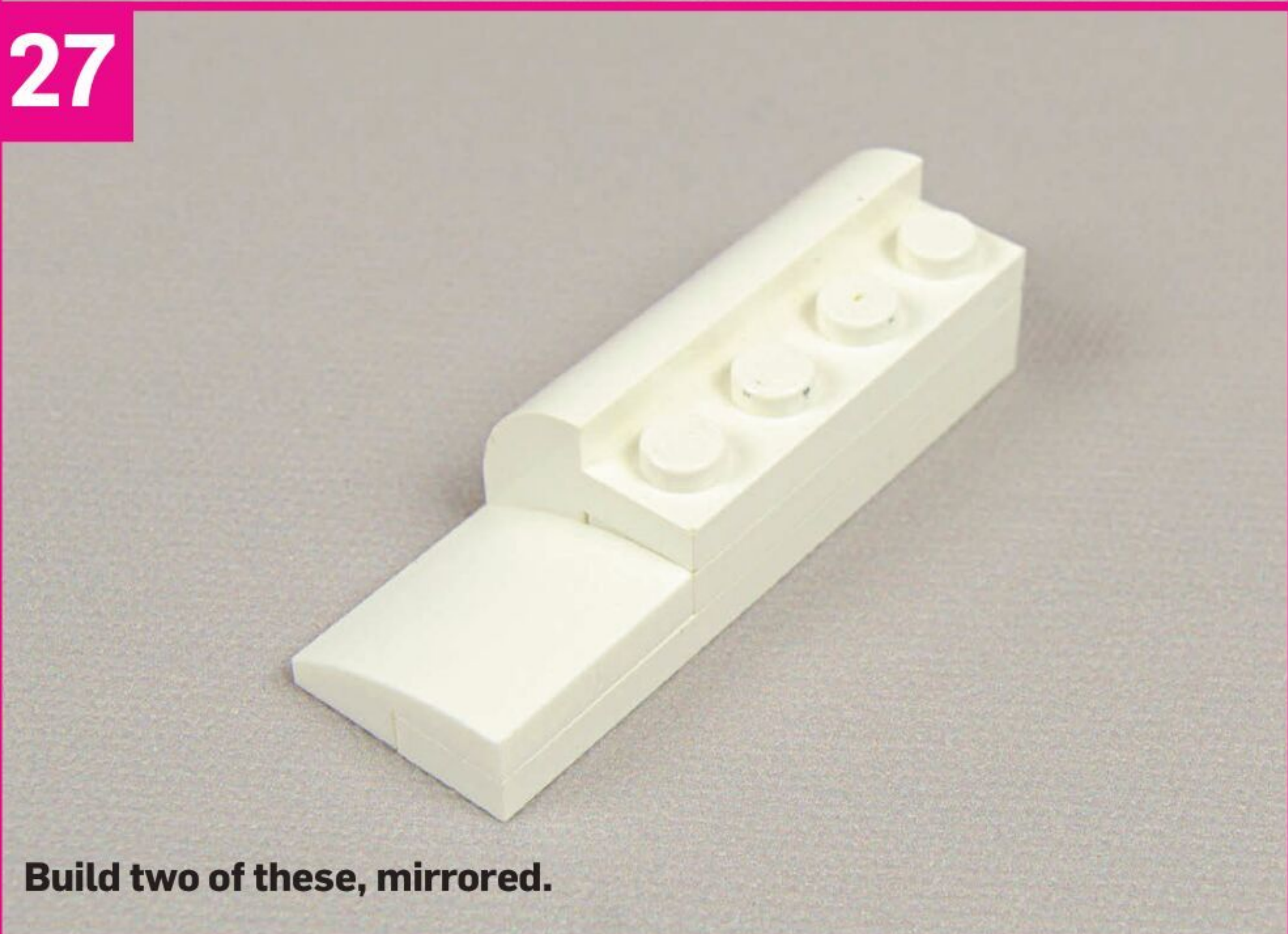
Mount the construct on the back of the plane.

26



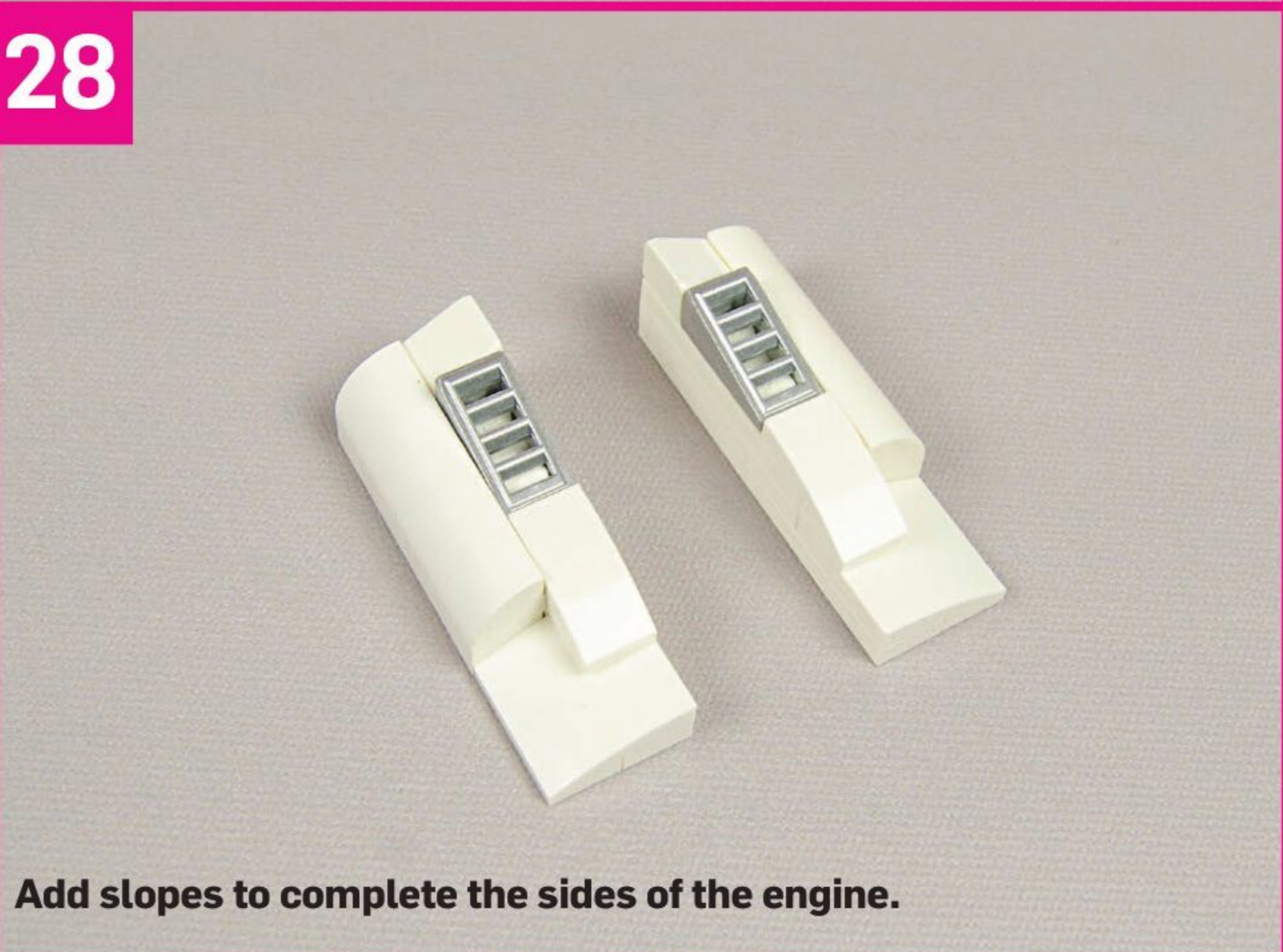
Add a tail and 2x6 tile.

27



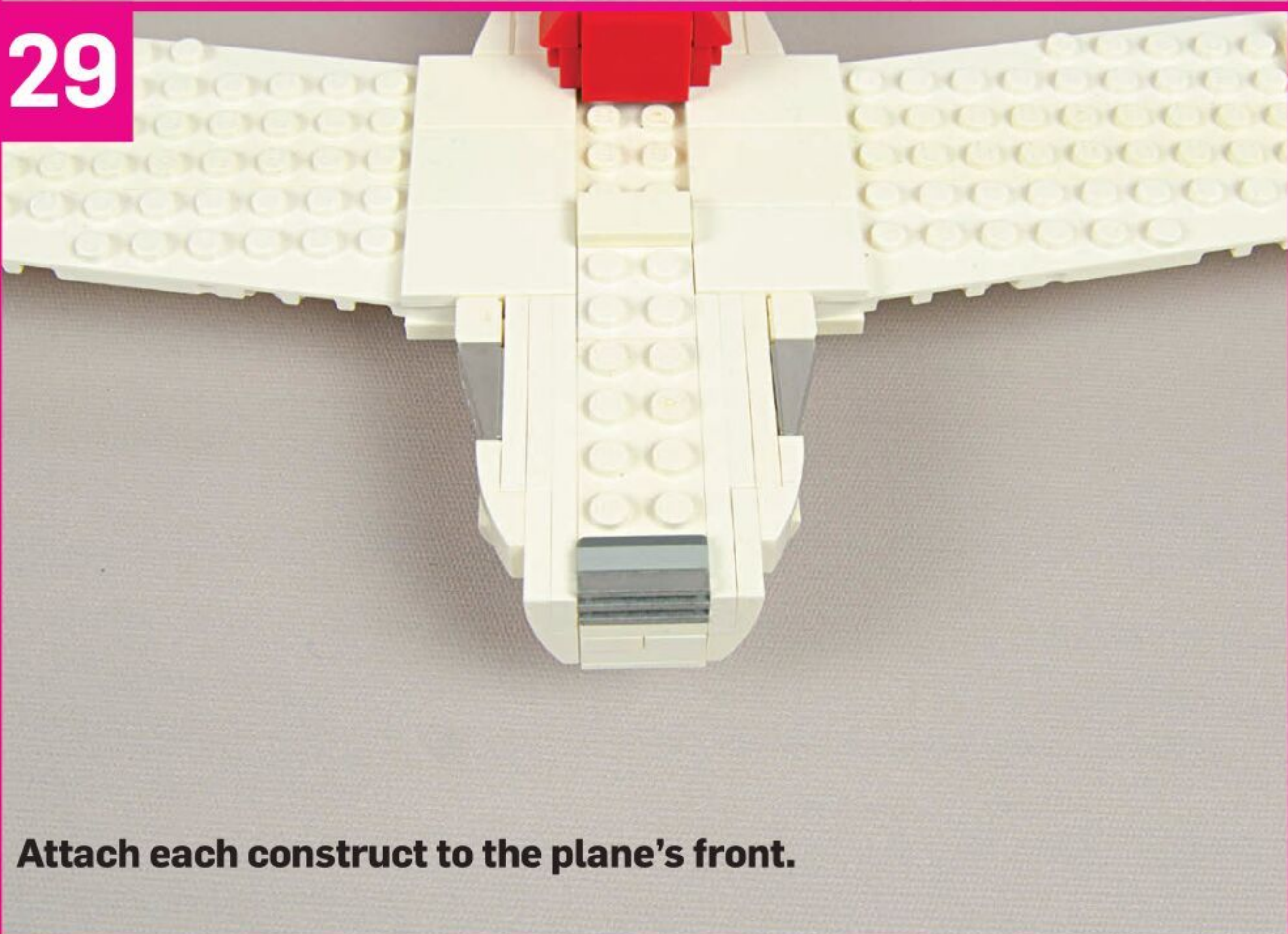
Build two of these, mirrored.

28



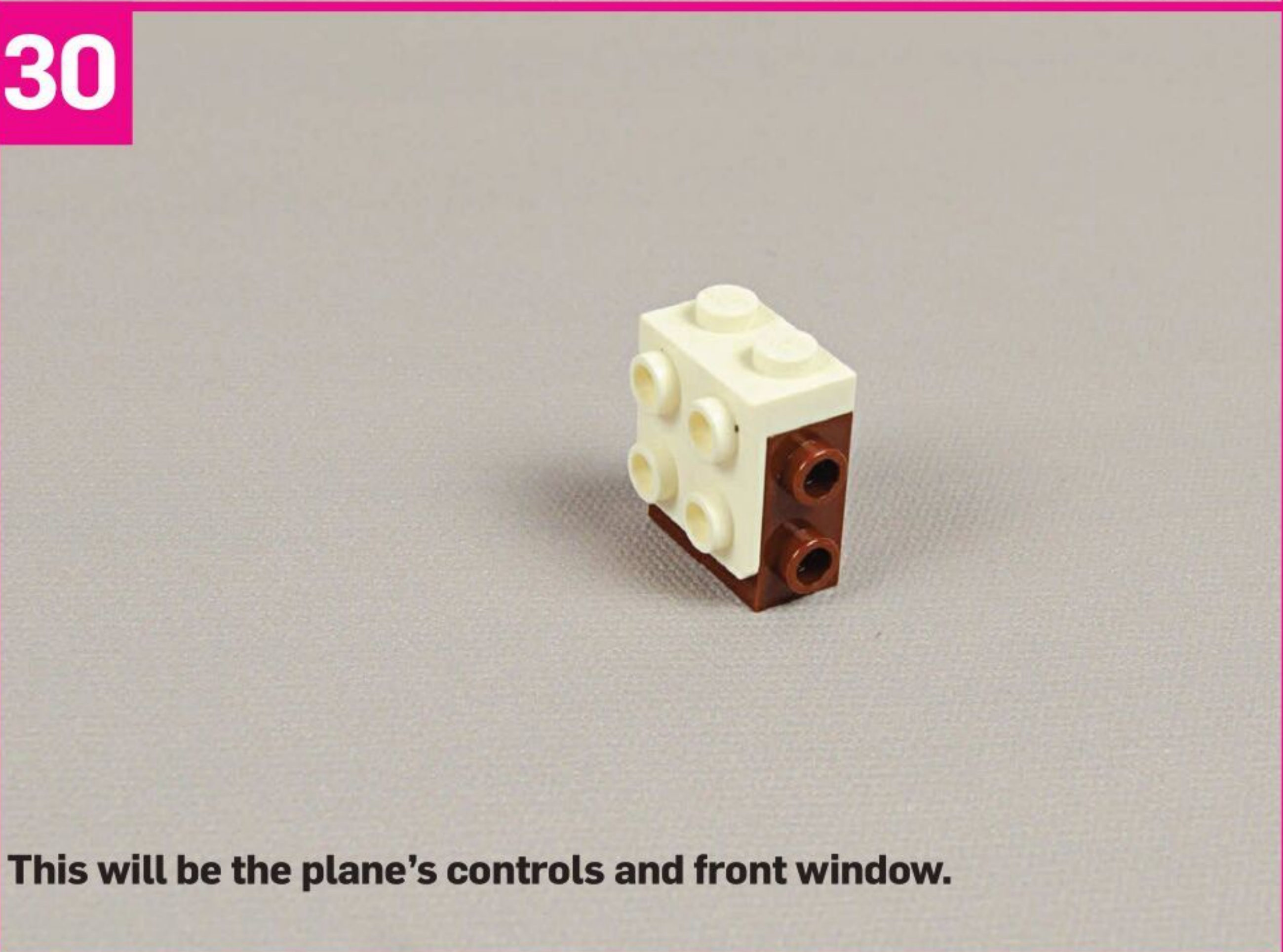
Add slopes to complete the sides of the engine.

29



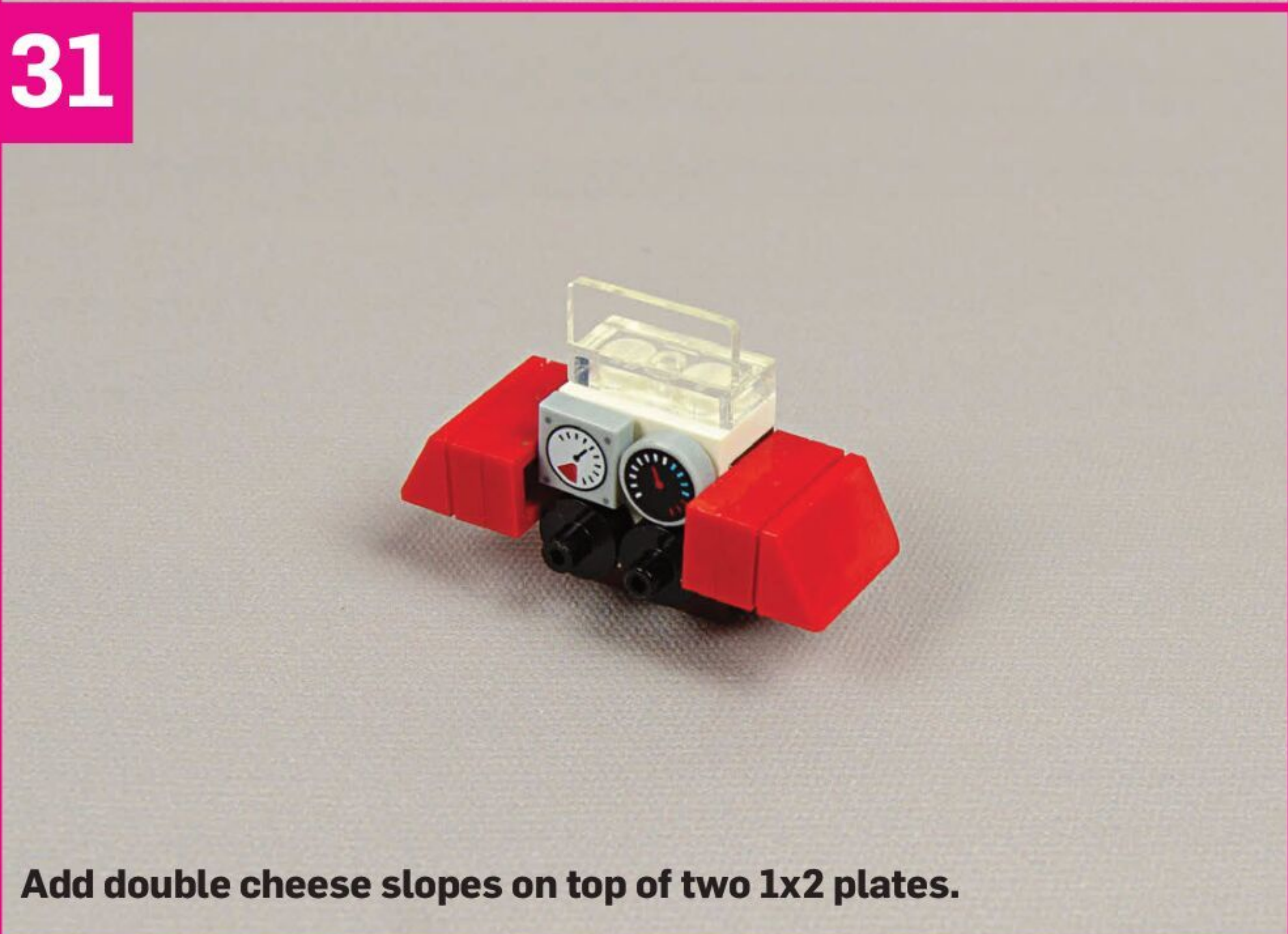
Attach each construct to the plane's front.

30



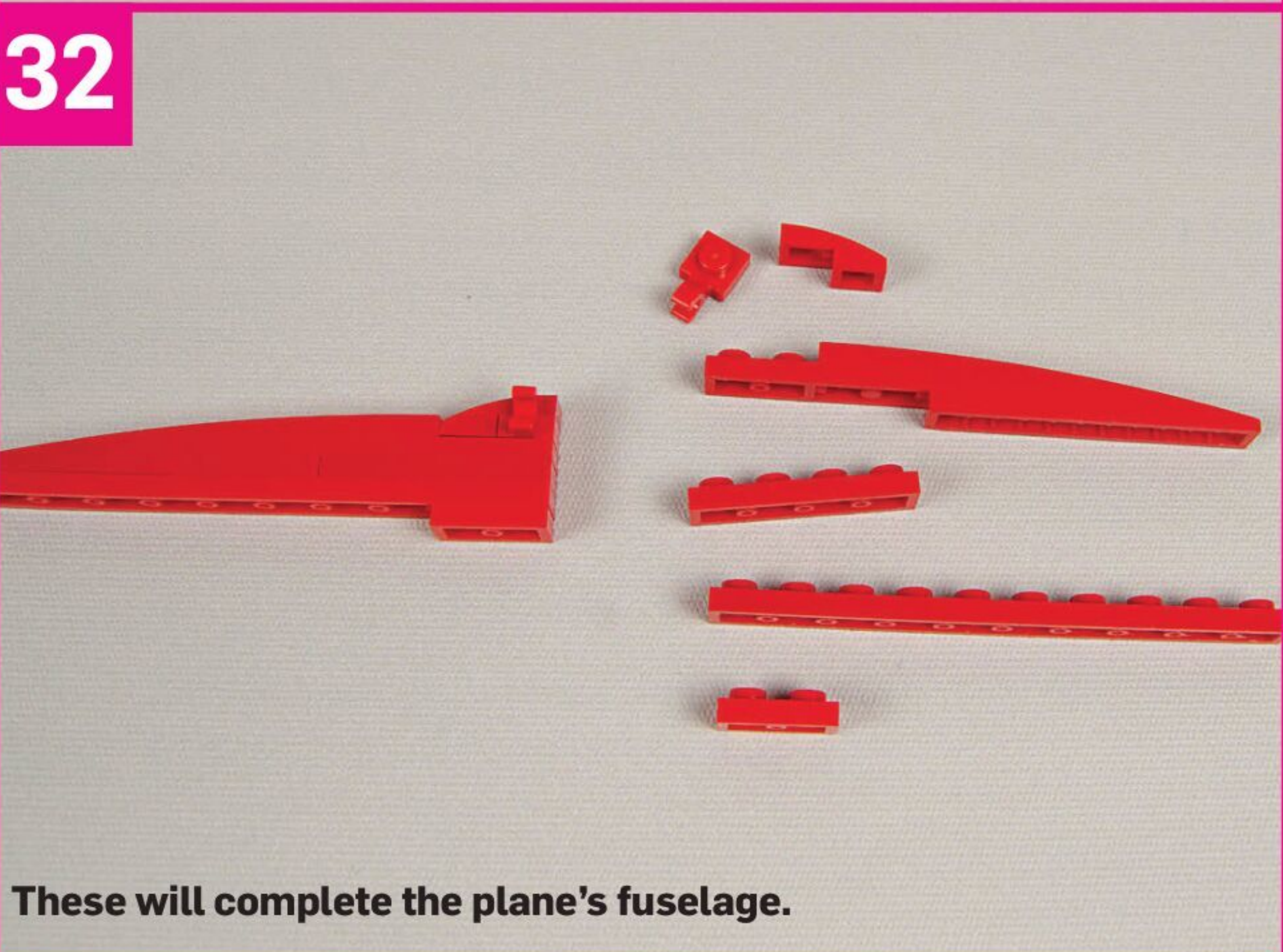
This will be the plane's controls and front window.

31



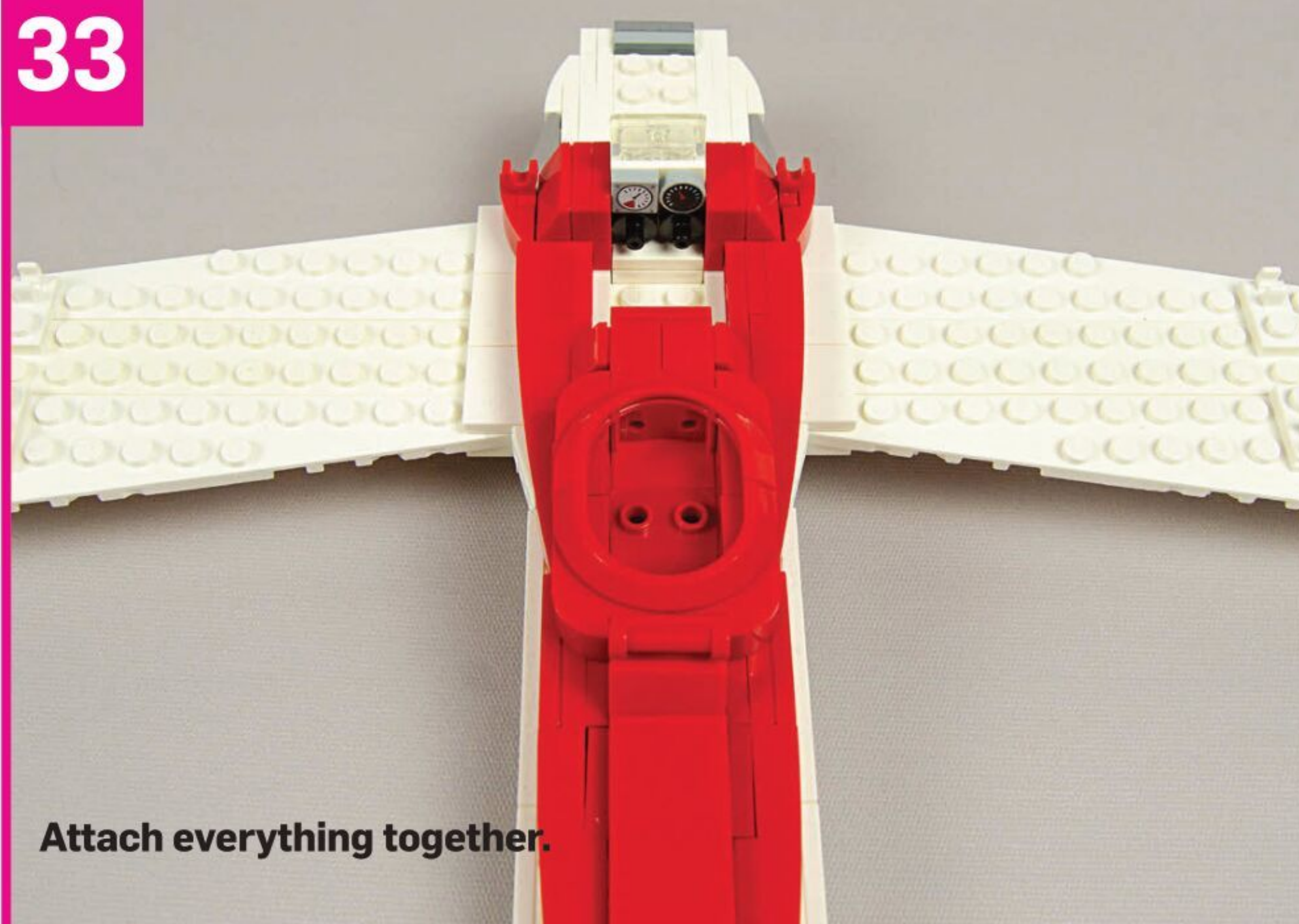
Add double cheese slopes on top of two 1x2 plates.

32



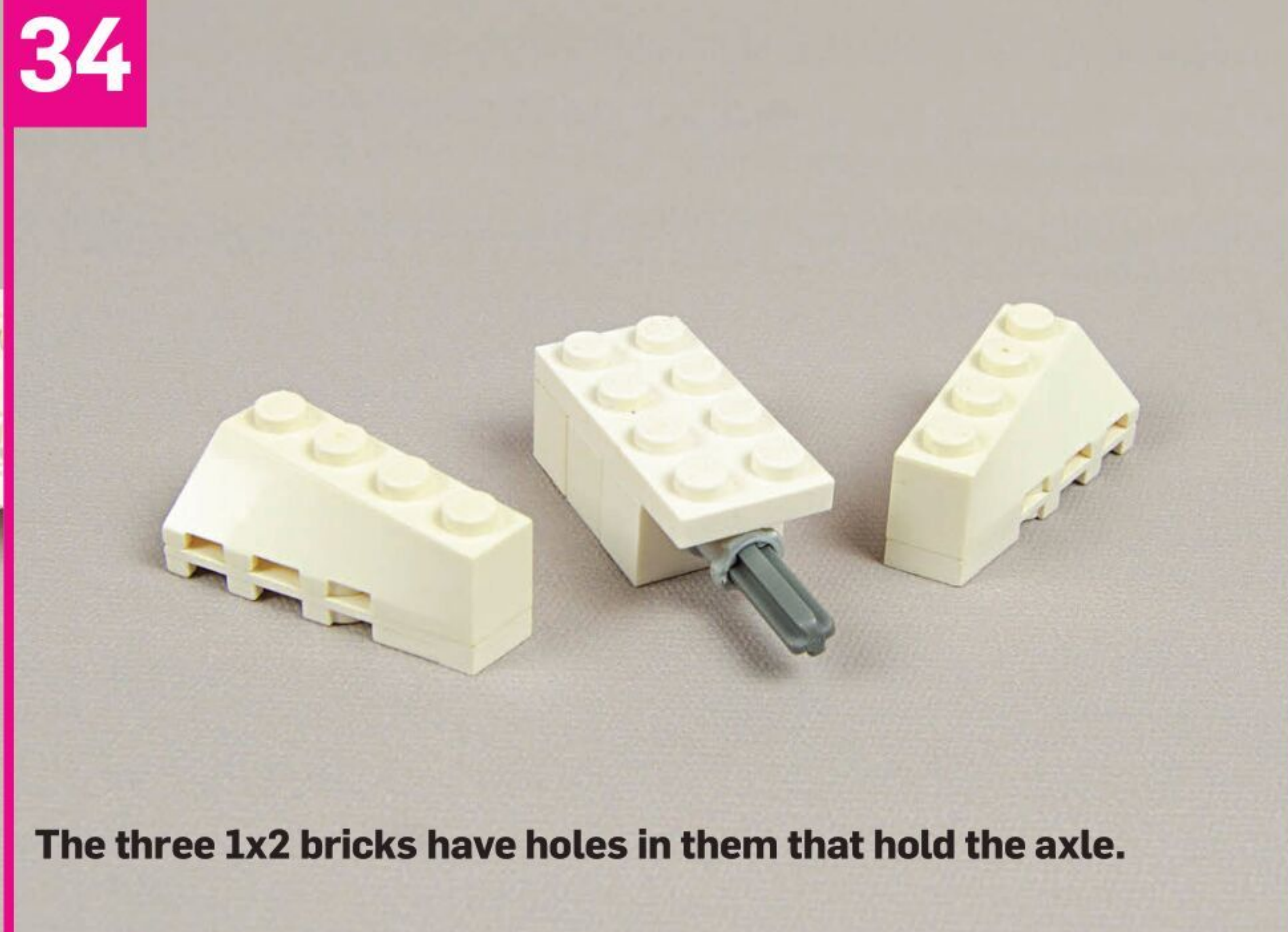
These will complete the plane's fuselage.

33



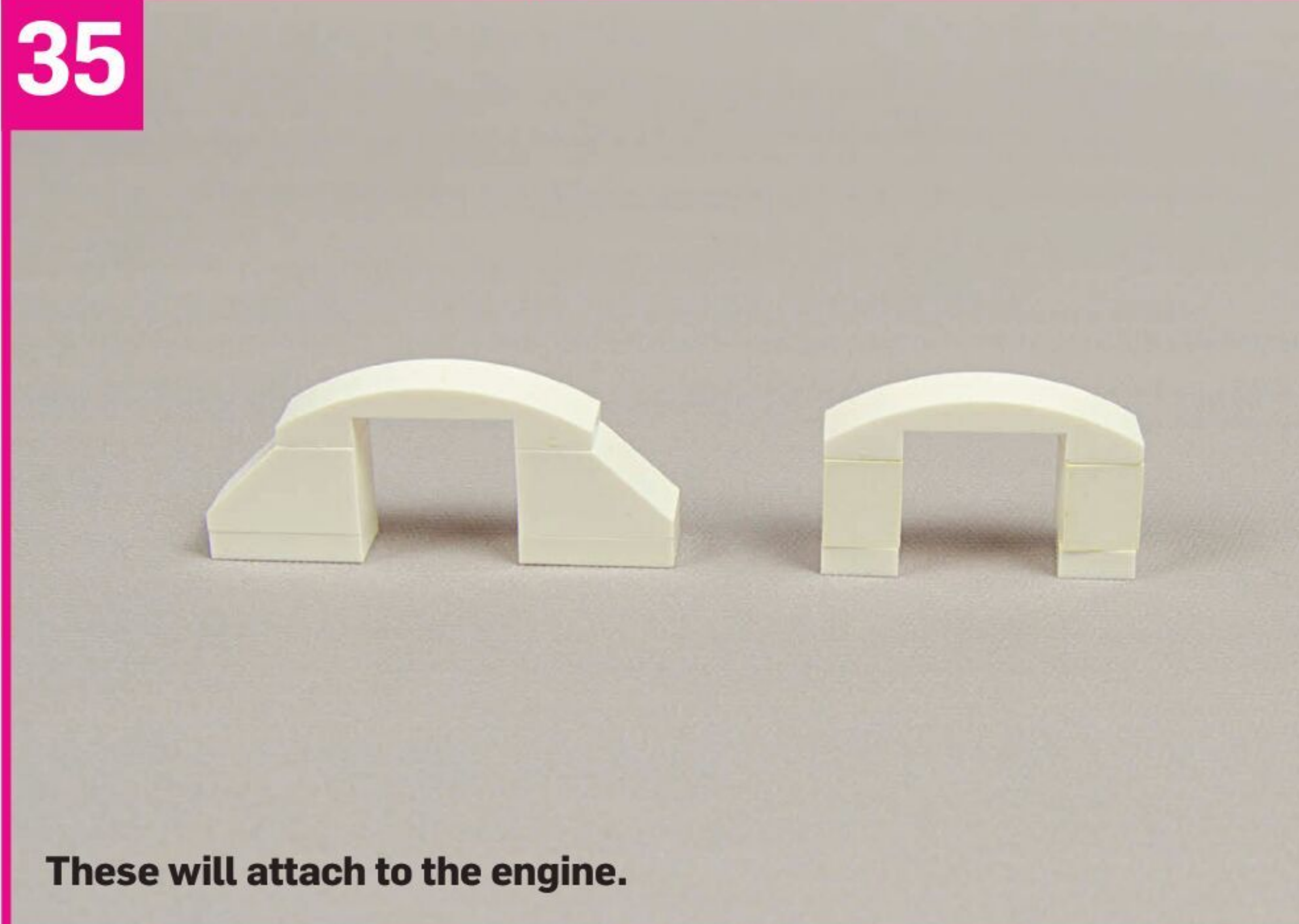
Attach everything together.

34



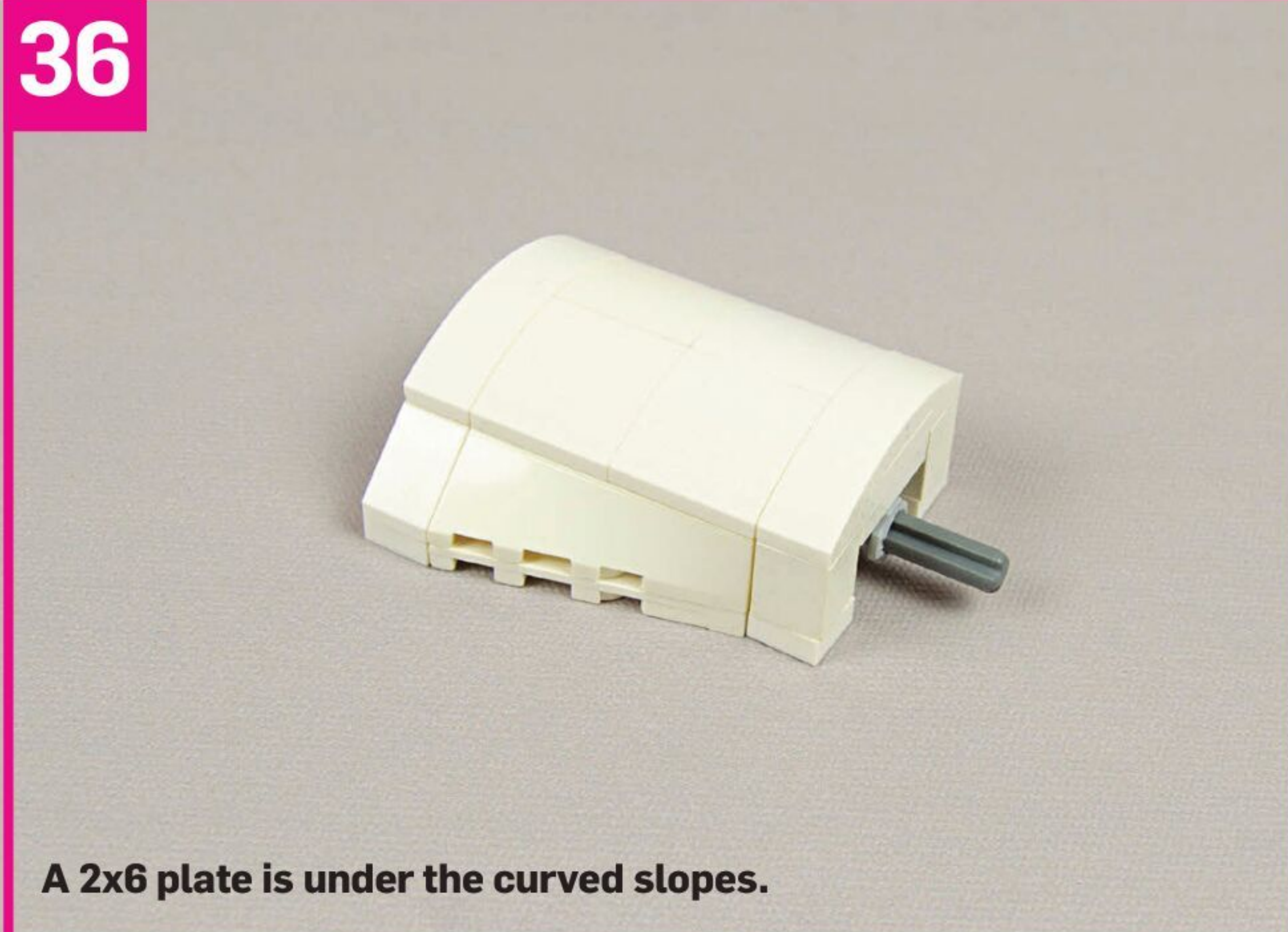
The three 1x2 bricks have holes in them that hold the axle.

35



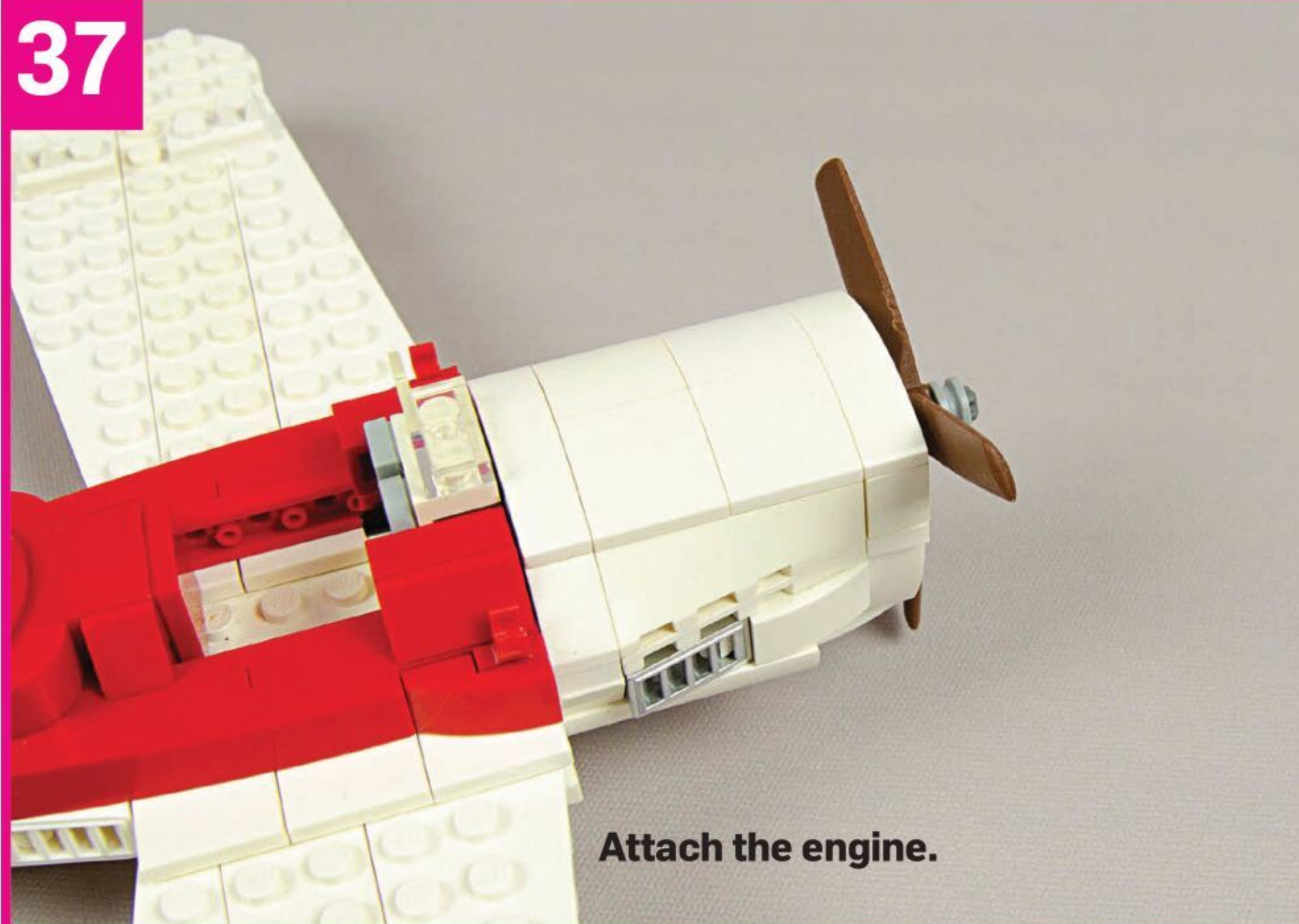
These will attach to the engine.

36



A 2x6 plate is under the curved slopes.

37



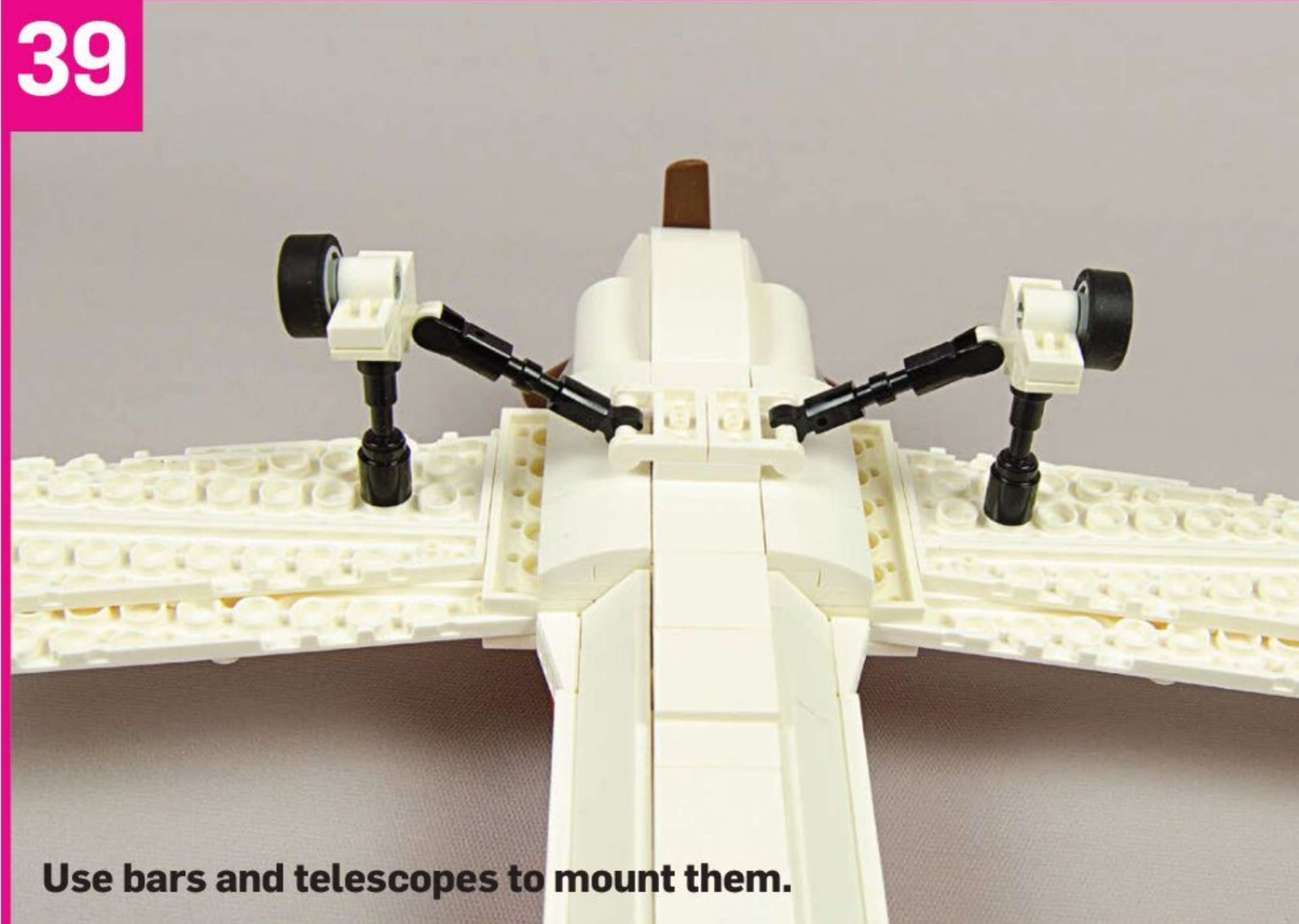
Attach the engine.

38



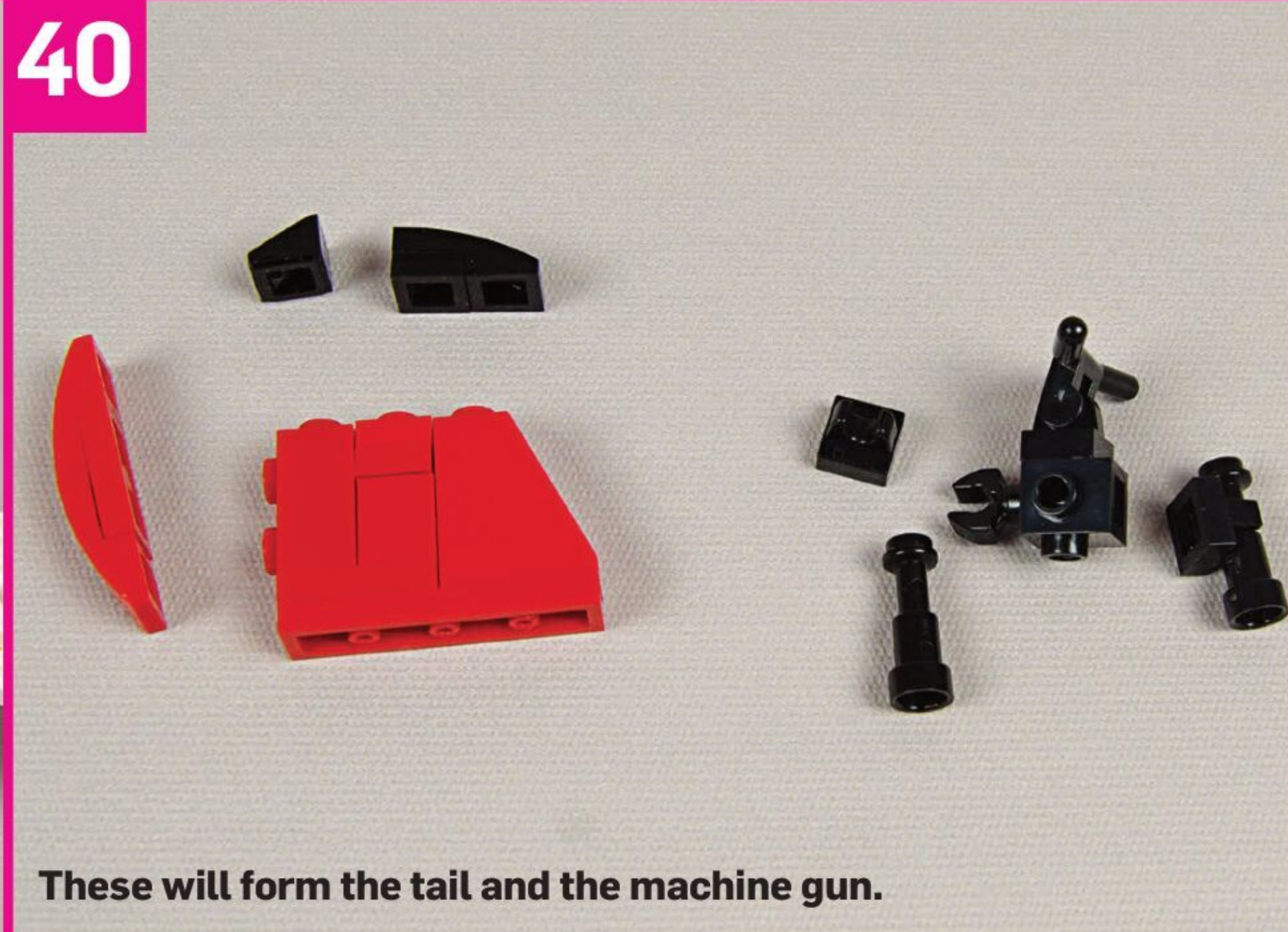
Build two of these mirrored, they will be the wheels.

39



Use bars and telescopes to mount them.

40



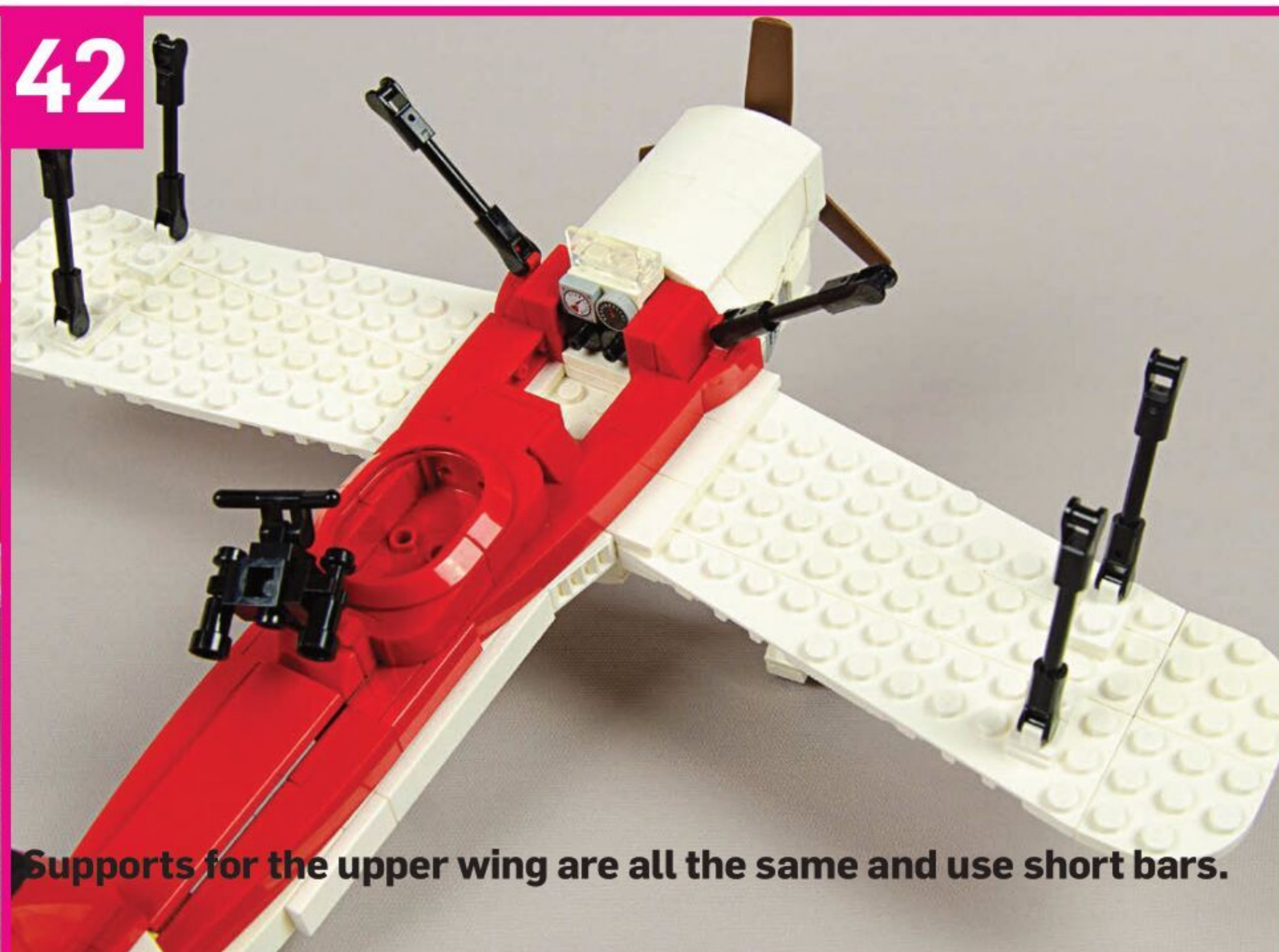
These will form the tail and the machine gun.

41



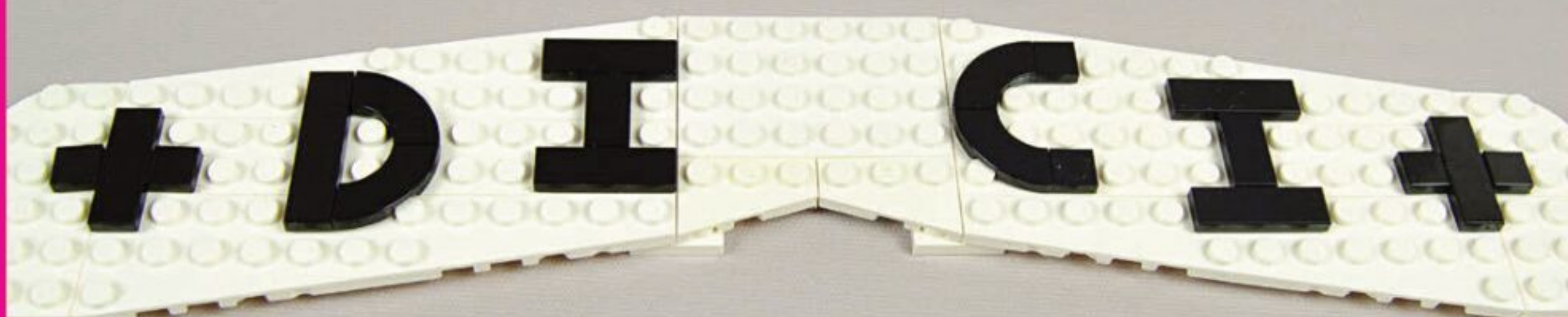
Join them to the back of the plane.

42



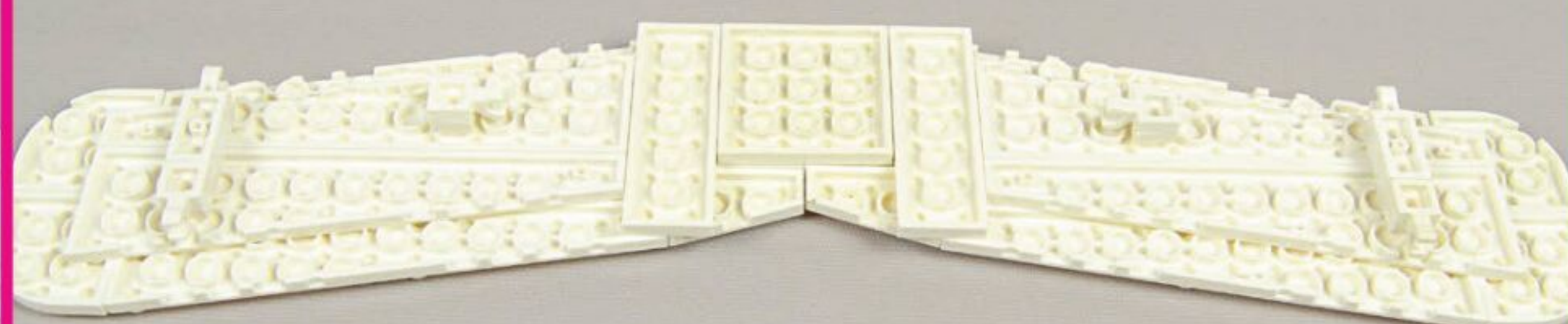
Supports for the upper wing are all the same and use short bars.

43



This is the top of the upper wing.

44



This is the bottom of the upper wing.

45

**HAVING AN UPDATED
BIPLANE FEELS ESSENTIAL FOR
LEGO INDY'S RETURN**



Mount the completed wing to finish the build. ■

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REWIND

6954 Renegade was only available in North America.



BLACKTRON

Space took a darker turn in 1987 when Blacktron arrived as the theme's most distinctive collection so far

Words: Graham E. Hancock **Pics:** Daniel Konstanski, the LEGO Group

BLACKTRON DOESN'T HAVE the most subtle faction name within the LEGO Space theme. Tron had arrived in cinemas five years prior (just a couple of years before development began) and the designers were making all of the ships black... so Blacktron it was.

After almost a decade of relatively friendly space exploration, with potential lasers and weapons positioned as antennae and communication devices, the design team was ready to bring conflict to the futuristic civilisations. Blacktron launched alongside Futuron and the contrast between the two couldn't have been starker.

The colour scheme of Blacktron immediately implies that these guys are the disruptors, villains who are going to spoil the harmony that the friendly looking space farers have been cultivating. Even the minifigures are all in black, with new torso detailing that was way beyond anything that had been offered before.

6954 Renegade is a good example of Blacktron's goal – LEGO marketers in the USA wanted more aggressive looking spaceships. Combined with a desire to imply that the Blacktron characters are the villains, it made sense to have a spooky looking ship with asymmetrical proportions.

While the set was beloved by the US team that was always pushing the LEGO designers to make things more aggressive, it spooked more conservative consumers in Europe. LEGO designers from the era use the shorthand 'German mothers' to describe the market that wanted – or was perceived to want – friendlier toys for their children. As a result, 6954 Renegade was only available in North America.

To offset the black models, yellow is the subtheme's complementary colour. Regular yellow pieces are scattered throughout the models, with transparent yellow canopies giving these vehicles and locations a very distinctive look. A little bit of transparent red is also peppered throughout the sets.

Blacktron lasted a few years as part of a new initiative within LEGO Space. Now, new factions would be introduced, be available for a few years, then cycle out in favour of something new.

Rather than completely abandon a good idea though, a new version of Blacktron – dubbed 'Blacktron II' by the fan community – arrived in 1991. It was quite different to the original iteration, with transparent green and grey bricks complementing the black.

When the LEGO Group revisited Blacktron earlier this year for a gift with purchase set, it was the original version that inspired 40580 Blacktron Cruiser. The set is a modern rendition of 6894 Invader, featuring modern parts and the first new Blacktron minifigure for 33 years.

An entire Blacktron world.

927015



Black Star Control Center to Moon Explorer: "Go!"
For daring explorers in space and time: The Black Star Control Center and 11 other new novelties.

LEGO

LEGOLAND
Space



MEMORY LANE

'YOU COULD ATTACH YOUR MINIFIGURE TO THE SWEATER'

GRAHAM HAS A VAGUE MEMORY OF WEARING LEGO BLACKTRON THEMED CLOTHING

One of my haziest LEGO memories is a sweater I had as a child. The sweater had a little popper on it – a bit like those you'd find instead of buttons sometimes on a child's jacket. Instead of being used to fasten anything up though, it was for a much better purpose.

The sweater had a complementary minifigure that had the protruding part of the popper on – so you could attach your minifigure to the sweater. Long after the sweater had disappeared, that minifigure still existed in my LEGO tubs. I always found it odd that I had a minifigure with a weird attachment on its back.

That was a Blacktron minifigure and the minifigure depicted on the sweater matched it. The part I'm hazy on though is whether it was the original Blacktron or Blacktron II... I suspect probably the latter, but I really wish I could properly remember and be certain.

BREAKING DOWN THE THEME



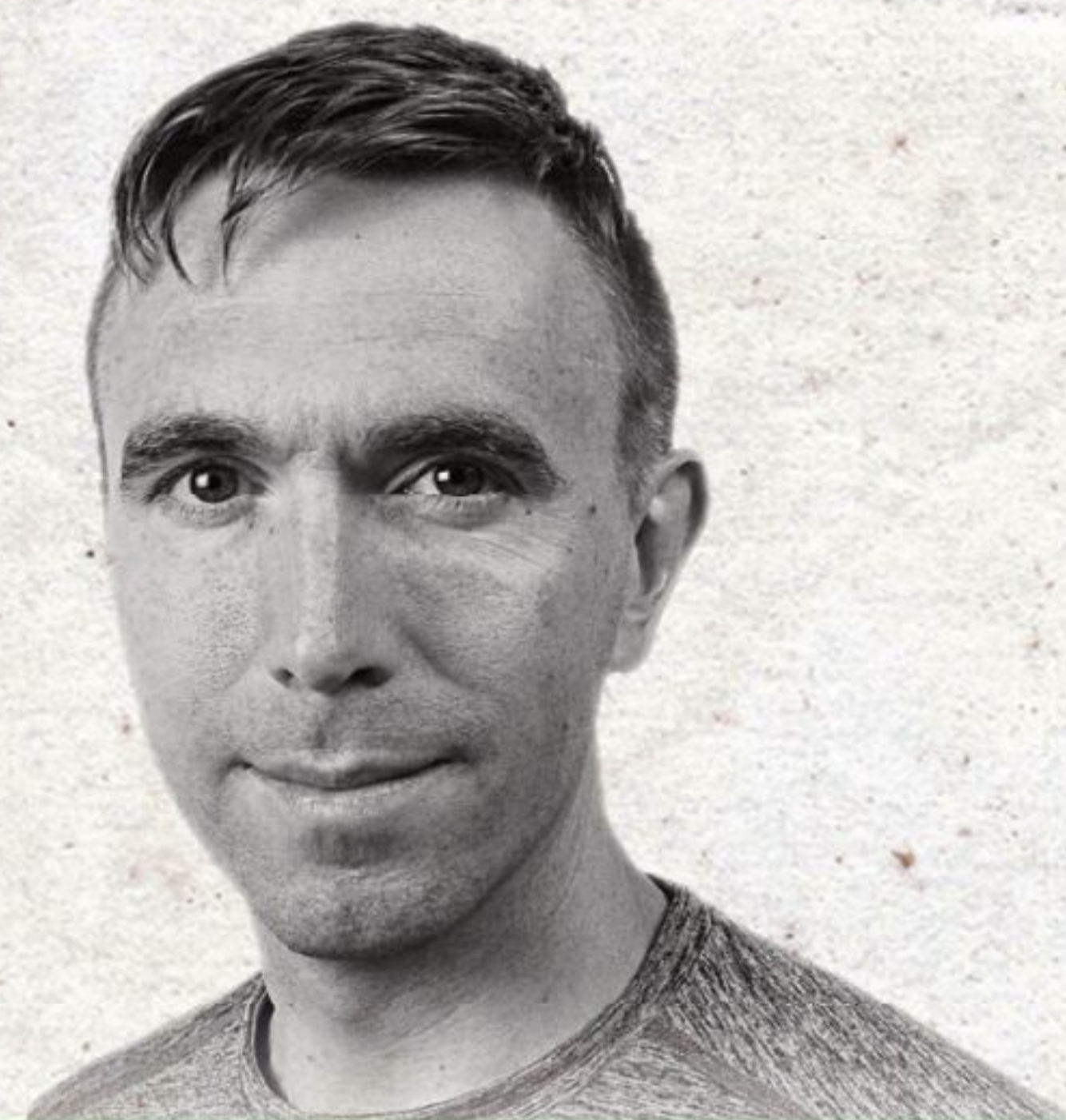
■ 6894 Invader, 6941 Battrax and 6954 Renegade were modular builds so you could mix and match them.

■ Blacktron minifigures appeared in Space Police sets as prisoners.

■ 1875 Meteor Monitor was released as part of a multipack after Blacktron had finished in 1990 – the colour scheme is different to the other sets.

BY THE NUMBERS
YEARS ACTIVE:

1987 1990



MEMORY LANE

'INCREDIBLE COLOURS AND COOL SHIP DESIGNS WERE AMAZING'

DANIEL WAS FASCINATED BY THE MODULAR WAY THAT BLACKTRON SETS WERE CONSTRUCTED

While I was already collecting LEGO products when Blacktron came out in 1987, during the years it was available I was acquiring Town sets. Because of this, I missed out on collecting any of the theme during its run.

Fortunately, my friend Todd's older brother didn't. Several years later, when Todd and I were in the heyday of our 'LEGO play' years, his brother aged out and passed down a sizeable collection of 1980s sets to his younger brother. Amongst them were several Blacktron sets that captivated me. The menacing black visors, incredible colours and cool ship designs were amazing.

One attribute blew my mind – that they could break apart and be recombined in different configurations. I spent hours on the floor of Todd's room creating my own ship designs by swapping out components from different sets.

6

SETS RELEASED

4

SPACESHIPS

4

GROUND VEHICLES

569

PIECES IN 6987 MESSAGE INTERCEPT BASE, THE LARGEST SET

29

PIECES IN 1875 METEOR MONITOR, THE SMALLEST SET

1,445

PIECES IN ALL OF THE SETS COMBINED

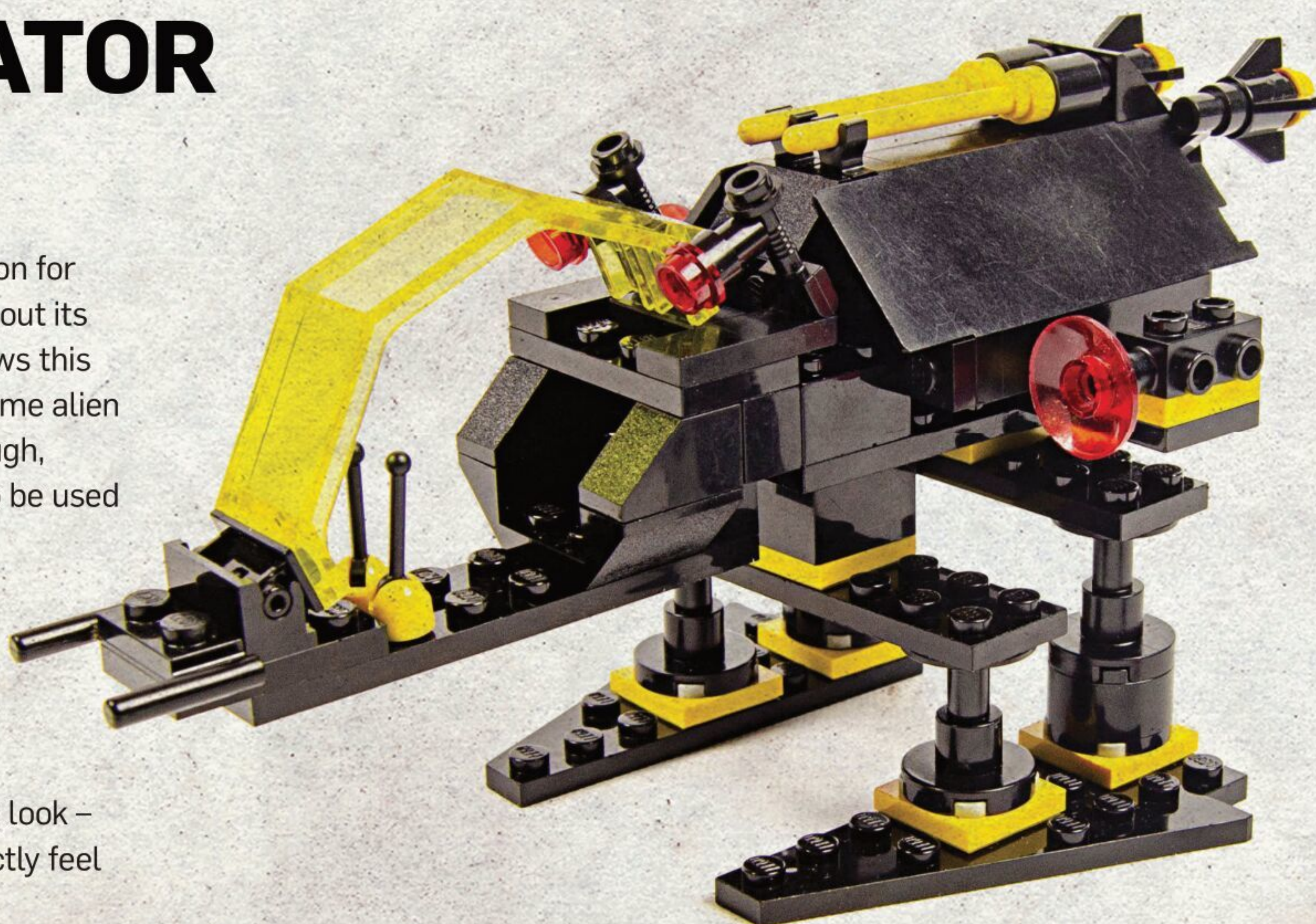
REVIEW

Year of release: 1988 / **Aftermarket price:** £102 new, £20 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 86

6876 ALIENATOR

WHILE WHEELS WERE a popular option for Space designers, the theme wasn't without its walkers. A neat sliding mechanism allows this set to seem as if it's stomping across some alien terrain. That's not the only function though, because the cockpit section detaches to be used as a spaceship.

That detaching cockpit feature is neat because you wouldn't know from looking at the model that it can separate in this way. Even though it's a smaller set in the collection, it still has a nice, intimidating look – the various tech adorning it doesn't exactly feel friendly.



Yellow is the perfect complement to black.



Year of release: 1987 / **Aftermarket price:** £228 new, £48 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 164

6894 INVADER

KNOWN AS BLACKTRON Cruiser in the UK, this is one sleek ship. Its elongated shape gives the impression of speed, with the trans-red elements at the back suggesting some amazing technological marvel. When you think how limited the parts palette was in 1987, it's amazing that this shaping was achieved.

This set does much more than look the part though as it can split into three sections – and if you so choose, the middle section can be omitted entirely. 6941 Battrax and 6954 Renegade have the same connectors, so you can even combine this set with either of those.

The middle section also has a storage compartment. By lifting up the top, you reveal the robot inside. It's a simple little construction, but a very charming one. If the Blacktron minifigures are the bad guys, it's safe to assume that this little droid has no clue what's going on.

One of Blacktron's highlights was getting a new take on Space minifigures. Entirely dressed in black, the torsos feature beautiful silver printing that is much more elegant and detailed than the printing on the minifigures that came before. These guys look cool and immediately grab the attention of a child (or adult child).

An intimidating ship.



Year of release: 1988 / **Aftermarket price:** £1,600 new, £223 used / **Minifigures:** 5 / **Pieces:** 569

6987 MESSAGE INTERCEPT BASE

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE a massive Space base with a baseplate featuring some lunar terrain. Because of the ambition of these sets, some aspects of them tend to look unfinished – and 6987 Message Intercept Base is no exception. What it lacks in finesse though, it makes up for in packing in cool features.

The Blacktron base is built off the surface using stilts, with the large central section serving as a hangar for the spaceship. What's really cool is that the hangar walls can open up, presumably a feature that allows the craft to take off. At the back of it there's a control area, with a ladder leading up to another room with more panels.

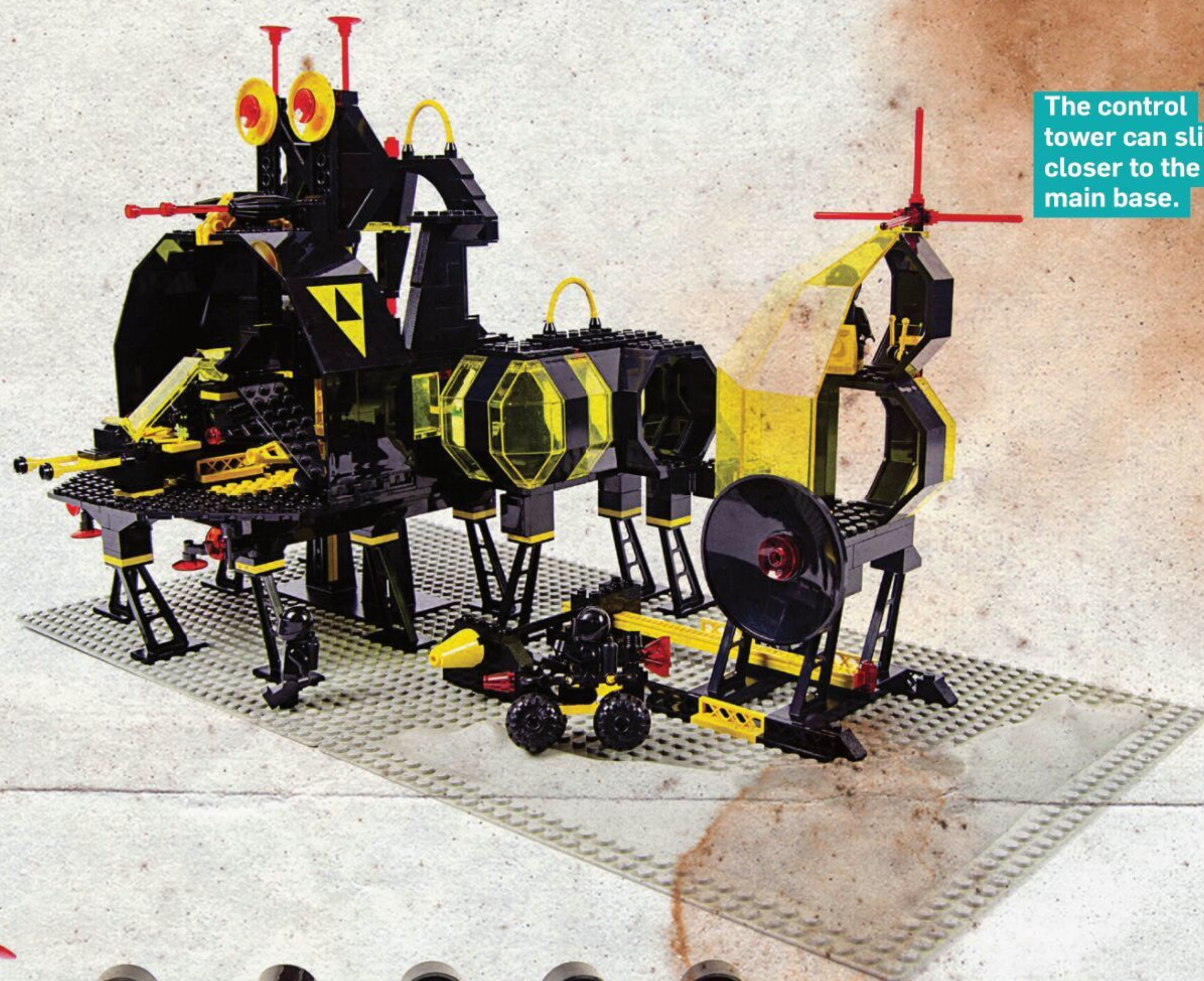
An exceptionally nice, enclosed corridor connects this part of the base to what is presumably, a control tower, a separate section that has space for a few minifigures. There's a chair for whoever has the job of monitoring incoming ships and transmissions. What's special about that section though is that it can slide along the ground and be moved away from the rest of the base.

Because this is a large 1980s set, you get vehicles with your base. The spaceship has the era's common problem of not being fully

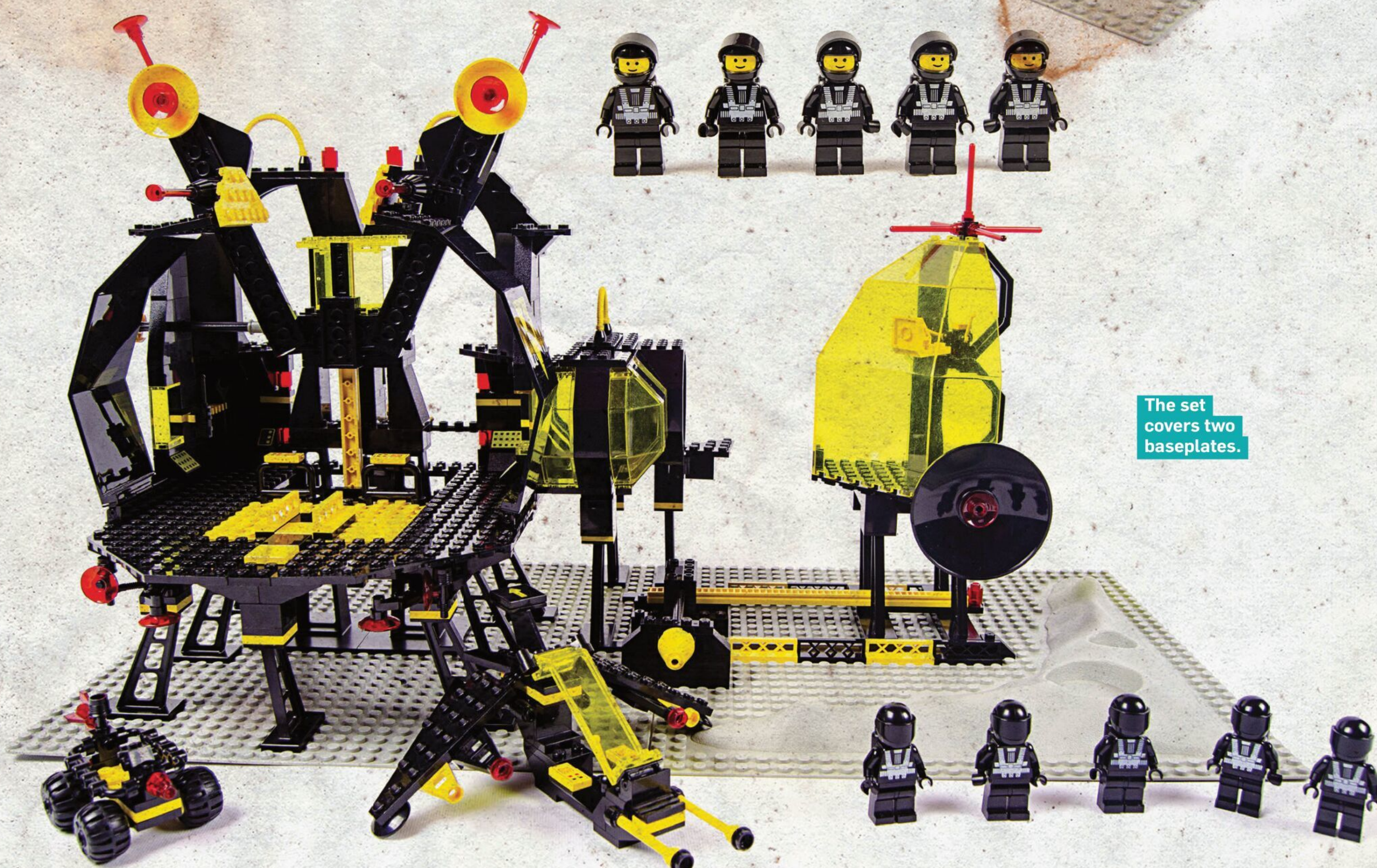
enclosed, but aside from that drawback it's really strong. The shape is lovely, with an angled back and sharp wings coming off it.

Then there's also a little four-wheeled river, which is really small and as a result looks nimble enough to tackle uncharted territory.

What makes this set so much is fun is that it's really big and open spaces have been left. That means you can position your minifigures around the model and imagine what these Blacktron characters are doing on this unknown planet.



The control tower can slide closer to the main base.



The set covers two baseplates.

RE-BUILD

BLACKTRON ICON

Build the Blacktron symbol and add the ultimate decoration to your LEGO room

Words & Pics: Daniel Konstanski

BLACKTRON HAS ONE of the most distinctive insignia of any Space theme, aside from the classic planet and spaceship combo. There is something menacing about the black and yellow triangles, which is likely why it remains popular with fans more than 35 years later.

Distinctive design and popularity would have made it a perfect candidate for the LEGO Art treatment had such a theme existed back in 1987. Since

almost none of the parts used in LEGO Art had been invented back then and the concept was still decades away, it's the perfect model to tackle here in Blockstalgia.

Triangles are deceptively difficult to build in LEGO form, but they're possible. This build took a few tries to get right, but was well worth the effort.

Display your
love of LEGO
Blacktron.

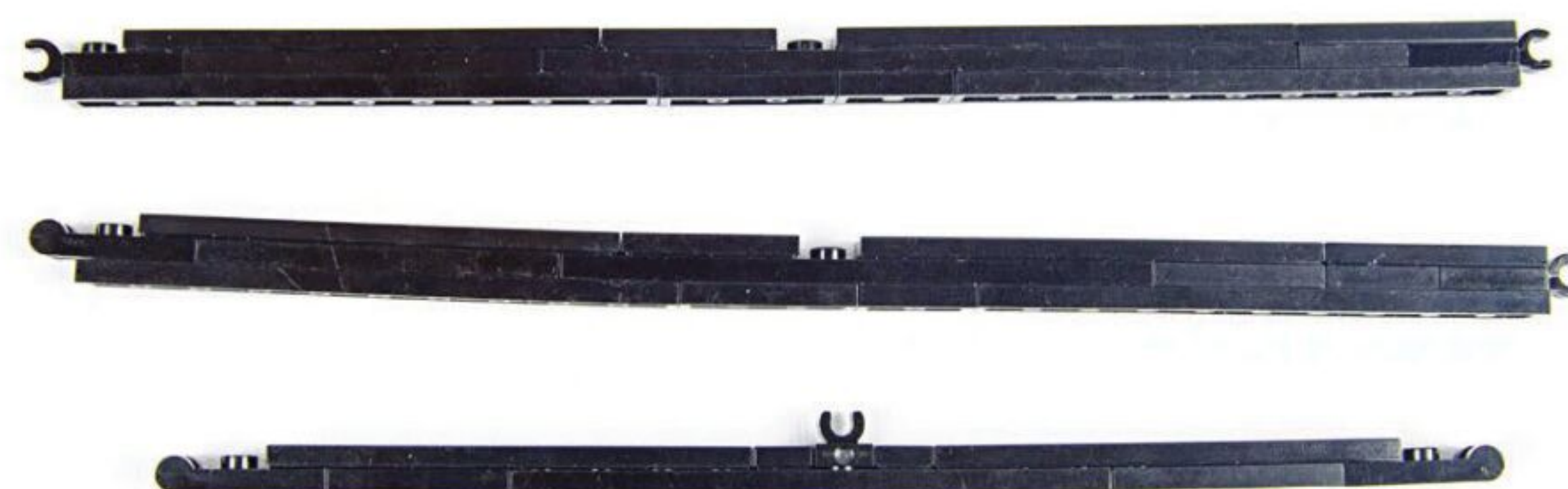


1



These parts will form the sides of a large triangle.

2



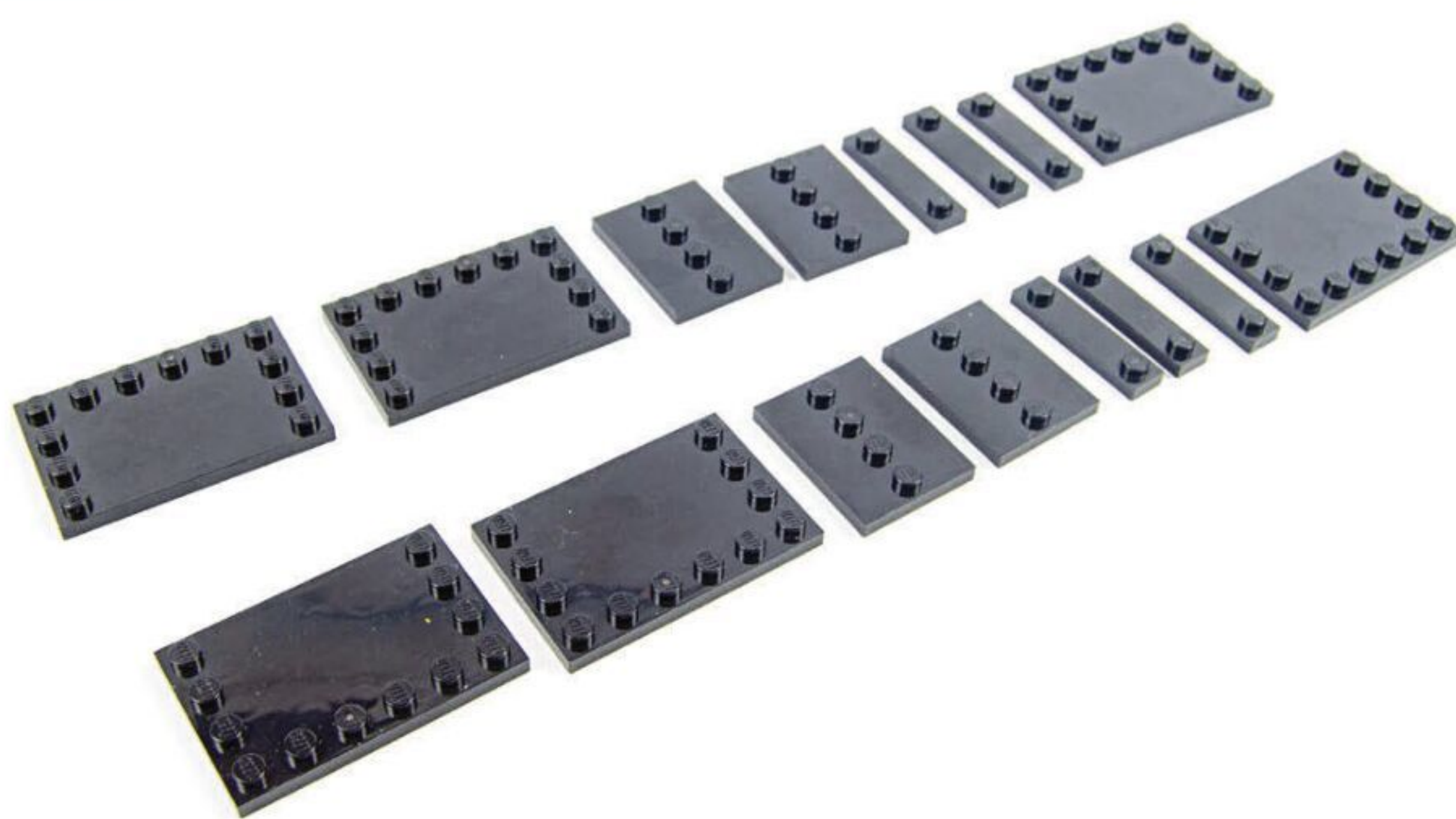
Add a second layer of plates to the matching pair and tiles to all.

3



Form the triangle.

4



Add these plates to the two matching sides.

5



Construct these as mirror images.

6



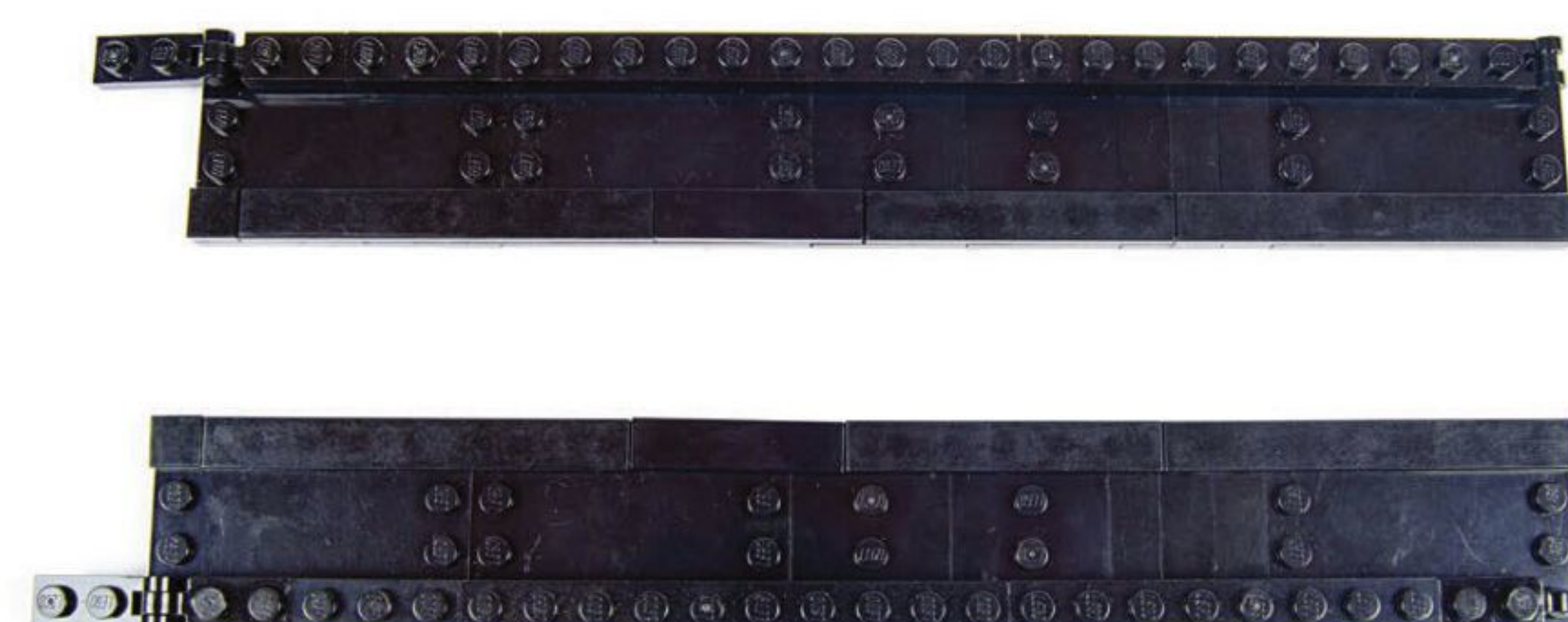
One more layer.

7



Collect modified plates with clips and bars.

8



Attach as shown.

9



Attach the sides to the triangle, tiles forward.

10



Now build the inner triangle.

11



Add tiles.

12



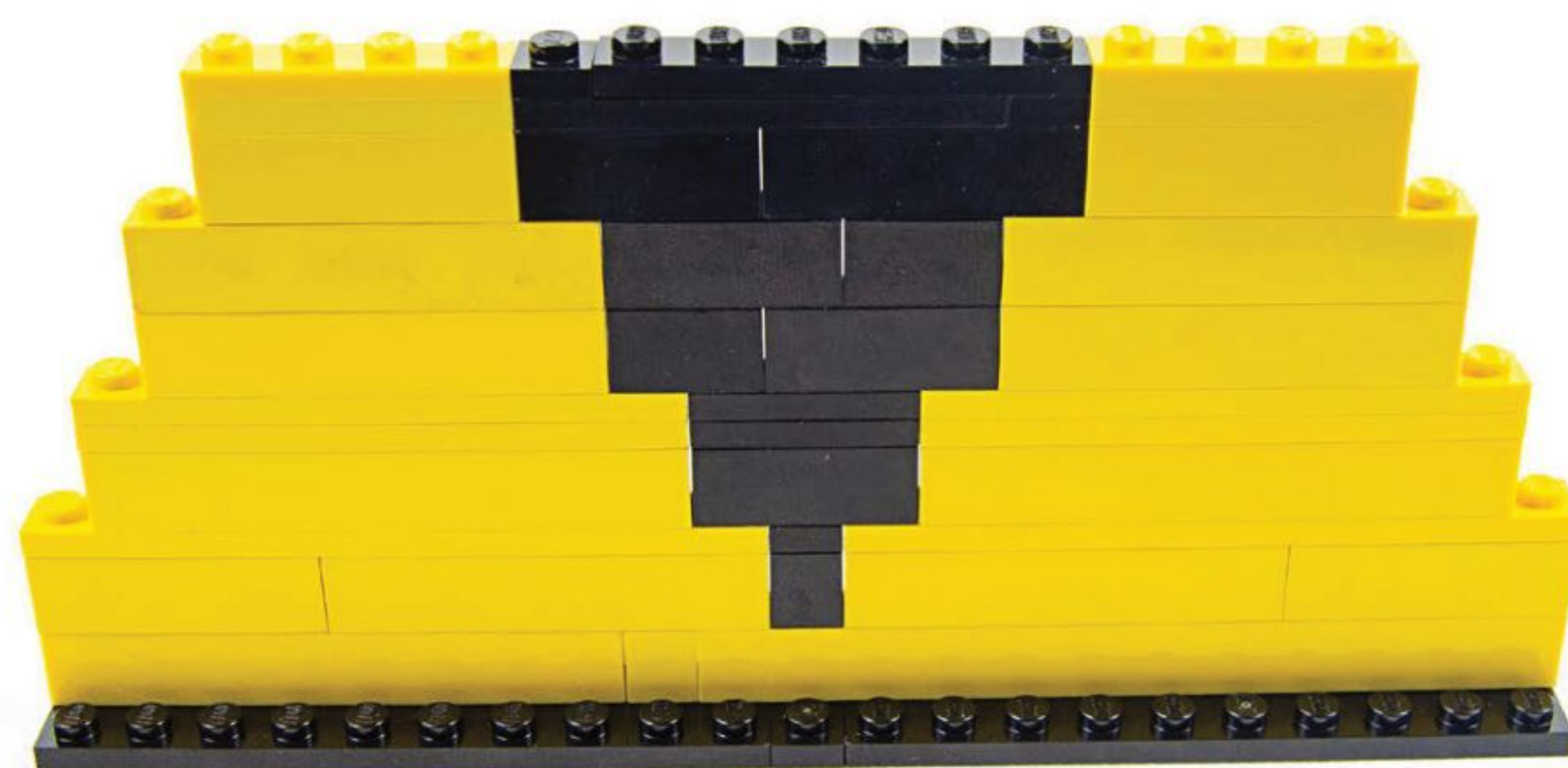
Insert the inner triangle.

13



Build this with bricks and tiles.

14



Build the bottom half of the insert on a row of 2x21 plates.

15



Connect the two sections, pins facing back.

16



Slide the insert into the frame.

17



Construct the bottom of the triangle.

18



Add another layer of 1x plates.

19



Attach the bottom.

20



Build the stand.

21



Attach it to the back.

22



Add the second bent Technic beam.

23



The finished build. ■

Blocks

BRICKIONARY

The language of LEGO has a wide, varied and ever-growing vocabulary. Blocks magazine helps you to decode it

A

ABS: Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene. The plastic most LEGO parts are made from.

AFOL: Adult Fan of LEGO.

B

Billund: Town in Denmark where the the LEGO Group was founded and the headquarters is located.

Bley: Bluish grey. Refers to the current LEGO grey, compared to the old version (known as... old grey).

BrickLink: The online marketplace for buying and selling LEGO bricks, now owned by the LEGO Group.

Brickset: An online database of LEGO sets.

Brick Train Awards: Annual fan organised train building contest.

BURP: Big Ugly Rock Piece. Moulded piece five bricks high with jagged edges.

C

Cheese Slope: A sloping LEGO part, named after the fact yellow pieces look like a wedge of cheese.

Clone Brands: Knock-off construction toys that copy aspects of, or sometimes entire, official LEGO sets.

Custom: A LEGO creation or individual element that uses non-LEGO parts, modified parts or accessories from third party vendors like BrickArms or BrickForge.

Customiser: A LEGO fan who's not afraid to modify LEGO parts. Customising may include painting, cutting, drilling, melting or adding non-LEGO parts to a creation. Considered heresy to the purist LEGO fan.

D

D2C: Direct to Consumer sets. Generally exclusive to LEGO stores, with high piece counts.

Dark Ages: The period in a LEGO fan's life when they set aside LEGO in favour of other, non-LEGO pursuits.

Draft: An activity common at LEGO

club meetings in which fans each bring a LEGO set, sort out all the elements and then take turns in picking out the type of part they want. An easy way to obtain parts in large quantities without buying multiple parts of the set yourself.

E

Erling: A 1x1 brick with one stud on its recessed side, named after its designer.

Evergreen: A theme that returns year after year, rather than only being available for one or two years.

G

Greeble: Pseudo-technical detail added to a LEGO creation to enhance its appearance, often seen in LEGO Space and Mecha creations.

GWP: Gift with purchase. A promotional item or set obtained by spending a minimum amount at LEGO Stores or LEGO.com.

H

Half-Stud Offset: A building technique that allows building without regards to standard alignment of studs on a plate, usually achieved with a jumper plate.

I

Ideas: Platform for fans to upload set ideas with the potential for them to become official LEGO releases.

Illegal: LEGO building techniques that break the 'rules' for connections between LEGO elements used by official LEGO set designers, particularly connections that stress the LEGO elements.

Inventory: The list of LEGO elements included in an official LEGO set. Several LEGO fan sites host set inventories including Peeron, Brickset and BrickLink.

IP: Intellectual property. The LEGO Group has many IP partners, such as Disney and Nintendo.

J

Jumper Plate: A 1x2 or 2x2 LEGO plate with only one stud in the centre. Useful for half-stud offset building.

K

KFOL: Kid Fan of LEGO. The LEGO Group's primary target demographic of between 5-12 years.

L

LCP: LEGO Certified Professional. A professional brick builder authorised by and affiliated with the LEGO Group.

LDD: LEGO Digital Designer. Free software for PC and Mac that lets you build LEGO models virtually.

Legal: LEGO building techniques that follow guidelines for official LEGO set designers.

LEGOLAND: Family theme parks inspired by the LEGO brand. The original location is in Billund, but now found all around the world.

LEGO Masters: The competitive televised building contest, with local versions airing globally.

LEGOs: Incorrect plural of LEGO.

LLDC: LEGOLAND Discovery Centre. A mini, indoor versions of the theme parks aimed specifically at children.

LUG: LEGO User Group. Local or regional LEGO clubs that meet and interact primarily in an offline 'real-world' context. This is changing as the number of online LUGs grows.

M

Microfig: Small figures, like those in the LEGO Games series.

Midi Scale: Refers to sets that are between miniature and minifigure scale. They do not include minifigures but are more detailed than mini sets. So far only Star Wars sets have midi versions.

Minifigure Scale: A LEGO creation built for the scale of standard LEGO minifigures.

MOC: My Own Creation. A model designed and built by a LEGO fan without instructions. Often used as a verb, 'MOCing'.

Mod: A modification of an official LEGO set, usually changing part colours or



adding to original designs.

N

NPU: Nice part usage. Taking a LEGO element and using it a new or unexpected way, usually different to the way it is most commonly used.

P

PAB: Pick-A-Brick. Buying individual bricks in the quantities needed from the LEGO Group's online or physical stores.

PAB Wall: The Pick-A-Brick wall found at official LEGO stores.

Purist: A LEGO fan who only uses official LEGO elements. Can be applied to LEGO creations that only contain official LEGO elements with no modifications or custom parts.

S

S@H or SAH: The official online store, LEGO.com. Used to be Shop at Home.

Sigfig: The minifigure version of a LEGO fan that is used in online communities as an avatar or 'signature minifigure'.

SNOT: Studs Not On Top. A building technique that places elements on their sides or even upside down to achieve a smooth surface.

T

TFOL: Teen Fan of LEGO.

TLG: The LEGO Group, the privately held parent company for all LEGO-related brands and companies worldwide.

TMA: Too many acronyms.

TRU: Toys R Us.

U

UCS: Ultimate Collector Series. A line of large LEGO Star Wars sets designed for older teens and adults.

V

Vignette: A small scene recreated on a square plate, generally 8x8 studs.

W

WIP: Work in progress, usually referring to a MOC.

BASIC BRICKS

Baseplates: The foundation for many projects, be it houses, space bases or castles. They're normally thin plates with no connections underneath so you can only build on top. Some older sets included raised baseplates resembling rocks, hills and other landscaping.

Bricks: At the core of LEGO is the basic brick. They come in a wide range of sizes, usually denoted by their stud pattern – i.e. 2x2, 2x6 – and in a huge colour palette.

Measurements: LEGO fans usually refer to parts by the number of studs they have. For example, a brick that has two studs on the short side and four studs on the longer side would be called a 2x4 brick.

Plates: Thinner than bricks but not as thin as baseplates. Three plates stacked together equals the height of one standard brick. Can be joined from above or below like standard bricks.

Printed Parts: Can be bricks, plates or tiles. They come with printed designs, often referred to as decorated parts.

Studs: The fundamental joining method of basic LEGO bricks.

Tiles: Thin, like plates but without any studs on top (see SNOT).

■ If you can think of a widely-used LEGO term that's not in the Brictionary, drop us a line at graham@blocksmag.com to get it included.



LEGO EVENTS

Do you run a physical or virtual event that should be listed here? Get in touch with us via graham@blocksmag.com and we'll add it to the list

JULY 2023

Bressingham Bricks (UK)

When: July 1 – 2

Where: Bressingham Steam Railway & Gardens, Norfolk

What's on: This LEGO model show at a visitor attraction in Norfolk is back for 2023, with LEGO model displays and activities.

Visit: www.bressingham.co.uk

Brick Rodeo (USA)

When: July 8 – 9

Where: Houston Marriott Sugar Land, Houston

What's on: A family-friendly LEGO convention and exhibition. Displays of unique models, presentations and workshops, vendors selling merchandise.

Visit: brickrodeo.com

Brick Féile (Ireland)

When: July 15 – 16

Where: CityNorth Hotel & Conference Centre, Ireland

What's on: A two-day show in Dublin near the airport, with LEGO model displays, activities and traders.

Visit: brickféile.ie

Brickmania 2023 (UK)

When: July 15 – 16

Where: Buchan Braes Hotel, Peterhead

What's on: A family event over two days with Tartan LUG displays of original LEGO builds, stalls, free build areas, a tombola and much more.

Visit: tartanlug.com

The West Country Brick Show (UK)

When: July 29

Where: The Charter Hall, Okehampton, Devon

What's on: This one day event is a fundraising show with LEGO model displays and a small number of traders.

Visit: facebook.com/groups/1306495669714243

AUGUST 2023

The Ultimate Brick Show (USA)

When: August 12

Where: Marion Pavilion, Marion, Illinois

What's on: LEGO displays, build challenges,

shopping opportunities and play areas.

Visit: gtwlug.org

BrickSlopes (USA)

When: August 24 – 27

Where: Mountain America Exposition Center, Sandy, Utah

What's on: Custom LEGO creations covering a variety of themes, builder presentations, contests and minifigure trading.

Visit: bricks.brickslopes.com

SEPTEMBER 2023

Ely Brick Show (UK)

When: September 2

Where: St Mary's Church, Ely, Cambridgeshire

What's on: LEGO displays and trade stands in aid of Ely Christians Against Poverty.

Visit: elybrickshow.co.uk

BrickCon 2023 (USA)

When: September 7 – 11

Where: Bellevue, Seattle, Washington

What's on: View thousands of models created by LEGO fans across the USA and shop a variety of products in the Brick Bazaar.

Visit: brickcon.org

Bricklincs (UK)

When: September 9 – 10

Where: Lincoln Christ's Hospital School, Lincoln

What's on: This LEGO show in Lincoln is back with LEGO fun for all ages – this time for two whole days. In aid of Fairy Bricks and a local charity

Visit: facebook.com/BrickLincs

OCTOBER 2023

Great Western Brick Show (UK)

When: October 7 – 8

Where: Steam Museum, Swindon

What's on: This long-running LEGO fan show in the south west of England is back for another weekend of LEGO displays and activities.

Visit: www.greatwesternbrickshow.com

Redhill Brick & Model Show (UK)

When: October 14

Where: Redhill, Surrey

What's on: LEGO displays and layouts, a

marketplace and activities.

Visit: facebook.com/redhillbrickandmodelshow

Sheffield Brick Festival (UK)

When: October 21 – 22

Where: Sheffield

What's on: A two day show in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. LEGO displays, activities and traders.

Visit: sheffieldlug.org/upcoming-events

NOVEMBER 2023

Shildon Brick Show (UK)

When: November 18 – 19

Where: Locomotion Museum, Shildon

What's on: This long-running LEGO show in North East England showcases LEGO models large and small, has a marketplace of LEGO related sellers and plenty of activities for all the family.

Visit: brickalleylug.co.uk/shildon

DECEMBER 2023

Brick Fest Live (USA)

When: December 16 – 17

Where: The BJCC, Birmingham, Alabama

What's on: Hands-on activities, brick pits, life-sized models, cosplayers, Minecraft build zone and more.

Visit: brickfestlive.com

Brick Fest Live (USA)

When: December 30 – 31

Where: Meadowlands Expo Center, Secaucus, New Jersey

What's on: Hands-on activities, brick pits, life-sized models, cosplayers, Minecraft build zone and more.

Visit: brickfestlive.com

BRICKSMAGGEE

PLAYFUL SINCE 2012

FROM THE VAULT

While 'Adults Welcome' is a relatively new initiative, the LEGO Group first targeted an older consumer 60 years ago

Words & Pics: Daniel Konstanski

IN RECENT YEARS there has been a concerted marketing effort by the LEGO Group to encourage sales to older builders. It isn't the first time that the company has sought the spending power of these adult consumers though.

From the 1950s into the 1960s, the LEGO Group made consistent, direct, overtures to adults. This effort consisted of encouraging adults to use LEGO bricks themselves and enticing them with indirect benefits the company's products could bring. Direct advertisements focused on LEGO bricks as a tool they could use while planning their family's future home.

In the economic boom that swept much of the western world following World War II, many people suddenly found themselves affluent enough to afford a home for the first time. Construction was going on everywhere. Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, the LEGO Group's second-generation owner, envisioned couples using LEGO bricks to design these homes.

Envisioning how a space would look from a 2D drawing was difficult for many people, so Godtfred thought that the ability to construct a model in 3D of a proposed layout could be a popular alternative. Accordingly, a concerted effort was made by the company to market that idea directly to adults. Advertisements showing parents constructing house designs, often

surrounded by children happily playing with LEGO bricks themselves. A few specific products, notably the first architecture sets, targeted potential adult builders directly.

There was also a strong indirect push by the company to rope in older builders. As it would likely be viewed as a cultural faux pas for adults to be using a 'children's toy' themselves, adverts presented LEGO sets as a way for children and their parents to bond. Adults who wouldn't build alone could be encouraged to get involved with their children.

By the 1970s, this push toward enticing adults to take up LEGO bricks had all but disappeared. LEGO products had spread around the globe and understanding what adults in each country or culture would want out of LEGO bricks was too much effort, as the company could increase sales by continuing to target children.

Given the difficulty of collating data at the time, adult builders would have been invisible to the company and a lot of guesswork would have been involved. It wasn't until the LEGO Group could analyse sales records that it became clear just how much money older fans were spending on LEGO bricks. When that happened of course, the company stated 'Adults Welcome' more explicitly than ever before. ■



Parents are using the schematic and drawing tools to plan their home.

Blocks

NEXT MONTH

IN SHOPS AUGUST 3

ELDORADO FORTRESS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



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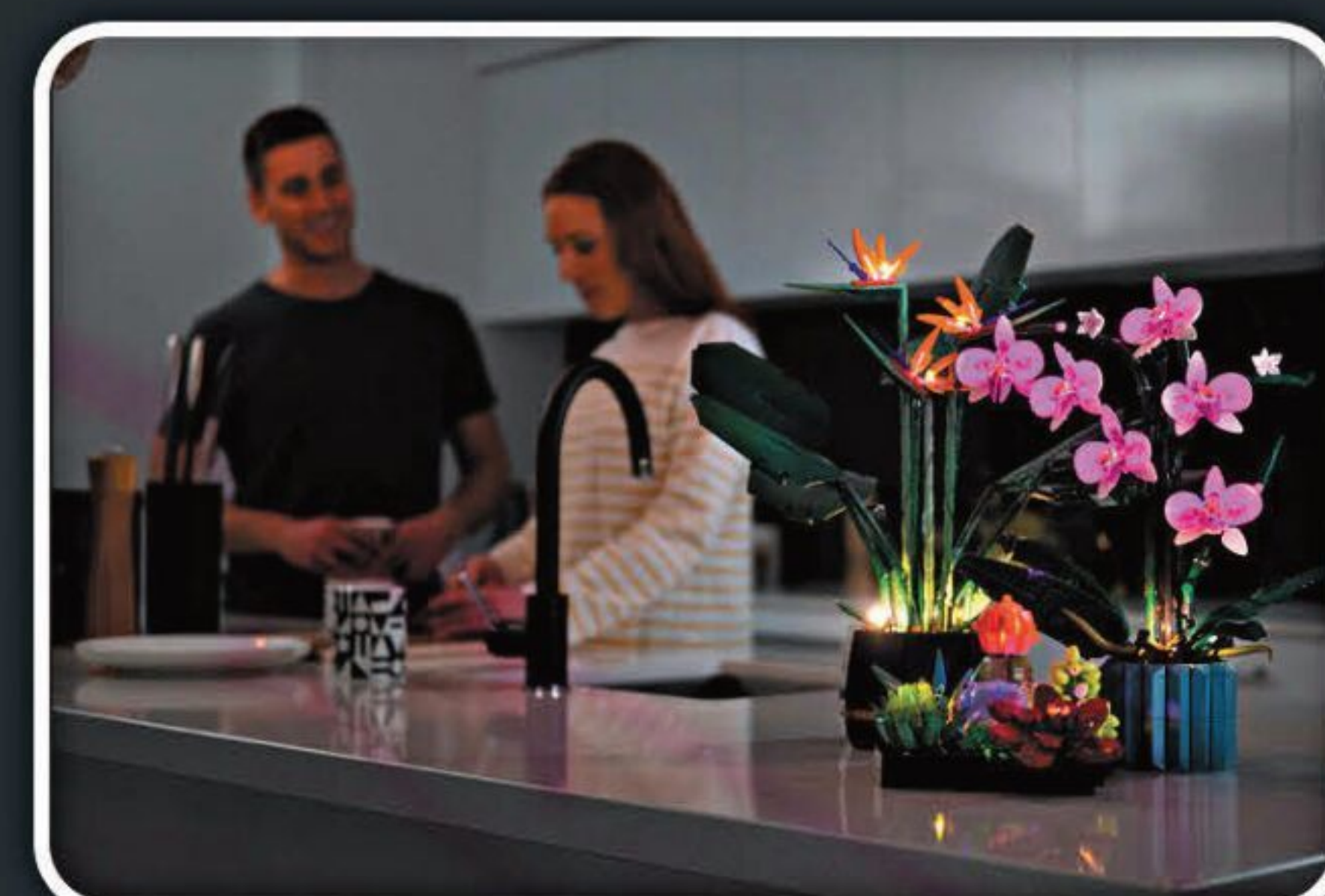
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